

JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE TODAY

MEANING AND SCOPE OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

John B. Chethimattam

GANGA AND GALILEE: HINDU AND CHRISTIAN
RESPONSES TO TRUTH

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A. M. Mundadan

STATEMENT OF I. T. A.

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JEEVADHARA

The Meeting of Religions

INTERRELIGIOUS
DIALOGUE TODAY

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Editorial

Interreligious dialogue is facing a crisis today. In this age of freedom, when colonialism is considered a matter of past history the various world religions gained the world attention they deserved and people gained a sympathetic and objective understanding of the faith of other men. But we are reaching a point when many who sincerely engaged in dialogue with other religions feel that matters are getting out of hand. Those who were long aware of the imperfections and inadequacies of their religious traditions got a romantic view of the attractive elements in other traditions, and have abandoned their own faith under the fascination of one element or other of other religions. Those who thought of dialogue as an effective means of converting others have become disillusioned since they found that men of other faiths were equally convinced of the truth of their own positions. Uniqueness is a claim put forward by followers of all religions. But it would be equally simplistic to declare that all religions are equal, since they are radically different in their approach to problems of religion, and even in the conception and formulation of the basic religious problems. Hence we are devoting this issue of *Jeevadhara* to take stock of inter-religious dialogue today.

Mathias Mundadan makes a general survey of the history of religious dialogue in India which is a meeting place of all religions down the centuries. Frank Podgorski makes a special study of the approach of Mircea Eliade, the comparative religionist who started in recent times a sympathetic study of world religions from a humanistic point of view. S. J. Samartha makes comparative study of Hindu and Christian response to truth emphasizing the radical difference in the conception of truth itself. He shows how a fruitful dialogue can be carried out even in this situation of radical difference in approach.

My article on the Meaning and Scope of Interreligious Dialogue is an examination of the radical change that has taken place in recent years in the Christian attitude to other religions. Abraham Koothottil reviews Christian theology of the Non-Christian religions.

What is important in religious dialogue is that we do not distort the beliefs of other people. As Krister Stendahl, Harvard Professor of Sacred Scripture stated: "the ninth commandment actually says it all: thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour... It is important that we do not picture the other person's faith in a manner they do not recognize as true." For meaningful dialogue one should be conscious of the reasons for one's own hope firmly rooted in one's own faith. Syncretism that seeks to take the honey from every flower without caring for the plant and the flower is not dialogue. Similarly taking one's own religious tradition as the model and norm for judging every other tradition is a prejudiced way of approaching dialogue. One should not start with the assumption that other religious traditions are culturally inferior to one's own or lacking in certain moral or spiritual values that have to be added from the outside will be obstructive of real dialogue. We have to take all religious traditions as historical realities, historically conditioned and hence have to be taken against their concrete historical background. Encounter of religious traditions is like that of human persons. Only by mutual respect for their individualities, internal consistency can they reach a mutual understanding of their convergent course towards the salvation of the whole man. As long as evangelization is conceived as proselytization, converting the other to one's own point of view, it can be an obstacle to real dialogue. But if it is understood as the proclamation of the saving Good News, dialogue is essentially evangelical. It is the common effort to arrive at the common truth, which should be the basic aim of every religion.

John B. Chethimattam

Meaning and Scope of Interreligious Dialogue

The Contemporary Situation

Today both the ecumenical movement and interreligious dialogue have, as it were, come to a dead end. Paradoxically great progress has already been achieved in doctrinal agreement between the different Christian churches and in the understanding of the tenets of different religions. But the leaders of churches as well as of religions seem to be afraid that any further step may affect the integrity of their traditions, their claims to superiority over other churches and religions and their authority and privileges. The ordinary people too are least concerned about doctrine, but reject other churches and religions mostly for historical, cultural, economic or political reasons. Hence whose is the next move to make is the crucial question today in both these fields. Most of the ecumenical contacts that go on today are more political in character than religious. So the danger is not only that humanity may continue scandalously divided into opposing religious groups, factions and sects, but also that any unity that may be achieved will be in disregard of religious faith and hence superficial. So the question is what meaningful method of procedure is left open to interreligious dialogue. The primary task is to convince the members and leaders of each religion that it is in their own interest and in the interest of the whole truth they are called upon to enter into honest and open dialogue with other religions. This article is intended to explore the radical changes that have taken place in recent times in the religious stance of Christianity and to indicate what place and role other religions have in achieving the salvation of all men.

I. Internal Changes in Christianity

History shows that no religious tradition has remained unchanged down the centuries. This is particularly true about Christianity. The changes that have taken place in the Christian

religious attitude in recent years is so radical that a few years ago they would have been almost unthinkable.

1. Shift from the Vertical to the Horizontal

In the beginning the followers of Jesus Christ considered themselves only as a renewal movement within the Jewish religion, affirming their allegiance to the Chosen People and faithful to Yahweh's covenant, with the sole exception that they preached Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Only when the gentiles accepted the saving message of Christ and the rites and traditions of Judaism appeared clearly irrelevant did they face the harsh reality of Jewish exclusivism and form themselves into a distinct religion with a new faith, a new morality and a new cult. It was a vertical division that distinguished the two communities by their different approaches to God, with distinctive codes of morality and radically different modes of worship. Down through the centuries what distinguished the various religions of humanity was the root mystery, the mystery of God which was differently interpreted in different religious traditions.

Today this vertical distinction has become almost irrelevant. First of all, today hardly any one seriously denies the unsoundable mystery behind and beyond all existence. The so called atheism questions only the God conceived and set up by men. Often this God, the supreme being, lawgiver and judge, outside of and over the whole universe is appealed to as a pretext for and legitimation of unjust structures set up by men to lord it over other people. The great scandal of religion today is that it is precisely those who believe in such a distant deity that practise apartheid, claim exclusive racial, cultural and economic superiority for themselves and do not hesitate to kill millions of human beings or even to exterminate whole peoples to maintain such false claims. Few are convinced or converted by the rational arguments to prove or disprove the existence of such a God since they take a leap beyond our finite experience by the authority of experience. Besides, a God conceived and affirmed merely as transcendent, that is outside of and additional to our world of experience cannot be infinite and cannot be God. As Karl Rahner states:

A particular factor called God, who makes himself felt as one reality among others but who influences these others, so creating a present which is cut off from other realities in our world of inner or external experience — this simply does not exist.

Hence the primary concern of religion even among Christian thinkers is no longer inquiry into the inner nature and ontology of God, but rather the meaning of God for man: What does the supreme mystery of existence contribute to the life of man? Does it isolate men into exclusive privileged groups totally unconcerned about other men, or embrace all men in an inclusive openness? Does it make men escape from the concerns of the actual world and society into the artificially created sanctuary of their churches and of their individual souls or inspire them to get involved in the vital problems of man today to transform the world and society itself to make them hospitable to all members of the human family.

Thus emphasis has shifted from a discussion of the one immutable divine essence and God's attributes, to a dynamic conception of the Godhead actively involved in the interrelationship of the entities in the world of reality pretending them all in the style of process theology, or to man's personal relationships with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit both in the community of the Church as well as in its task in the world, as pointed out by Vatican II. God is not a static impersonal object but dynamic relationship of persons that call for the active response of human persons, which in no way infringes upon the infinitude of the Absolute.

2. Attitude towards the Bible

Traditionally Bible was taken as an accurate record of events, of what God said and did to communicate information about himself to man. When in 1677 Richard Simon an Oratorian stated in his *Histoire Critique du vieux Testament*, 'Moses cannot be the author of all the books attributed to him', at the instigation of Bossuet he was expelled from the Oratory and the Paris edition of the book destroyed. For more than

two centuries the Church resisted the application of historical criticism to the Bible. Some Catholic writers even countered it with several "lives of Christ" based on the Gospels as if these were actual biographies of Christ. But in 1943 Pius XII with his *Divino Afflante Spiritu* gave official recognition to the historico-critical method in studying the Bible: The exegete must "by and with the utmost care and without neglecting any data provided by recent research establish the manner of expression and situation of life of the Biblical writer, in what period he lived, what oral and written sources he used and what literary mode he adopted. In this way he will more adequately recognize who the biblical writer was and what his intention might have been." Vatican Council II fully acknowledged that the Gospels were not chronicles of the events of Christ's life, but the new understanding of Jesus the apostoles gained about him after his resurrection: "The sacred authors wrote the four gospels, selecting somethings from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explicating somethings in view of the situation of their churches, and preserving the form of proclamation; but always in such fashion that they told us the honest truth about Jesus."² Bible is not something dictated by God. Divine inspiration means only that the "truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation" is taught there faithfully and without error.³ What this truth is has to be found out by critical interpretation of the text. As Thomas Aquinas had stated long ago: "Things which cannot affect our salvation do not belong to inspiration."

3. The Idea of Revelation

From the Middle Ages until quite recently Christianity was presented as a "revealed religion" consisting of a set of propositional truths attested to by God as revealer, such as 'There are three persons in one God', and 'Jesus Christ is truly God'. Vatican II has shown that this is too simplistic an idea of revelation. Through revelation "the invisible God out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends and

2. *Dei Verbum* § 19

3. *Ibid.*, § 11

lives among them" inviting and taking them into friendship with him.⁴ Mere verbal attestation would only indicate something not truly possessed, while revelation is God's incipient self-communication to the human spirit calling for a response in faith. In it Christ actually "reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear."⁵ Christ as the key to the meaning of all history, and "the joy of every human heart, and the answer to all its yearnings" is the focal point and fullness of revelation.⁶ For the disciples even the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation were not extrinsically imposed by abstract authoritative teaching, but were grasped by them by reflection on the data of experience concerning the Risen Lord. Hence reason and revelation are complementary, in the same way as the internal experience and the external expression of revelation itself. The crucial question in the decision of faith "is not whether we should accept what God vouches for, but rather whether He does actually vouch for that which we are being asked to believe".⁷ We have to rely on the obscure intimations of the divine presence to decide whether the divine witness is really saying what he is alleged to be saying.⁸ According to Avery Dulles "the discernment of a divinely given pattern in the events of biblical history which constitutes...the heart of the Christian revelation" is somewhat analogous to the way science establishes real patterns in nature. In both the future implications extend indefinitely beyond the experience they were originally known to control.⁹

Hence a growing number of Christian theologians question the traditional view that considered 'revealed truths' as primary in revelation:

Revelation is not a set of propositional truths prefabricated in heaven and artificially inseminated

4. *Dei Verbum* § 2

5. *Gaudium et Spes* § 22

6. *Ibid.*, § 14.

7. Avery Dulles S. J., "The Meaning of Revelation", *The Dynamics of Christian Thought*, Vol. 1, ed. Joseph Papin: Villanova Univ. 1970, p. 61.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62

into the minds of men. In the present age, it would be disastrous to seek to perpetuate the mythical or magical view of revelation depicting it as an infusion of propositional truths into the minds of seers and prophets.¹⁰

II. New attitude towards other religions

Bible gives the impression that the only revelation that mattered was the one which came to humanity through Abraham and Moses in the context of the history of the "chosen" people. This has also been in general the traditional view in the Christian church: Other religions start with man and go as high as they can in their search for God, while the Judeo-Christian religion is the answer to the aspirations of the entire universe proclaiming "the descent of God towards the world, in order to communicate His life to it".¹¹ But Bible itself indicates that other nations and traditions were not entirely deprived of the self disclosure of God. God's covenant with Noah was supposed to embrace the whole human race (Gen. 9: 1-17). Those who do not have the Mosaic law have the law written in their hearts (Rom. 2: 15; 1: 19-20). If the Judaic people and even the disciples of Christ had to discern the self-disclosure of God in and through the historic events of Israel and the human actions and words of Jesus, and his presence with the disciples after the Easter event, are the evidences of God found also "in the regularity of seasons and the fruitfulness of the earth" (Acts 14: 17) and the manifestations of divine providence in the histories of nations and individuals any less convincing revelations of the same God? The difference can only be in what they disclose about God and what they mean for the human race as a whole. No religion is a simple one way traffic. Every religion is man's search for God and God's self-communication to man; even man's search is initiated by God and is an initial divine revelation. Hence today there is a new willingness among Christian theologians to look at other religions in the common context of the divine economy of salvation for all men.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 72

11. J. Danielou, *The Salvation of the Nations*, Univ. Notre Dame Press, 1962, p. 14.

i) The Fact of Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism is a universally acknowledged phenomenon in the world today. In the past relatively few people gave any serious consideration to the fact that there were faiths and traditions other than their own that look on the problems of life and worldly existence in a different way. Medieval and early modern Western Christendom had boundaries that shut out all other religions barring the irritating presence of some Jews. Even today the majority of Western Christian theologians know precious little about other religions, and discussion of which comes outside of the main problems of theology: as far as Christian theology is concerned other religions are given no direct reference except in an adversary context. This lack of interfaith reference in the discussion of one's own faith is true also about other religions like Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism each of which ascribes to its own tradition a privileged and unique place against which other traditions are inadequate and imperfect if not erroneous outright.

This gross neglect of the actual fact of religious pluralism in the world in the discussion of one's own faith comes from a purely ideological conception of religion: An ideology is self contained and governed by its own inner logic without any external reference or exception. The new understanding of religion in the technological age, on the other hand, emphasizes the fact that faith is no mere creed or ideology but an ever continuing response to God's word that addresses man in and through the changing situations of life. Faith is not first and primarily a ready made theory and conceptual system to be applied to an objective system of impersonal coordinates, but, life and praxis shot through and through with the ever continuing self disclosure of God intimately connected with man's own response in faith. Any theory or conceptual framework is only an inadequate abstraction from this ineffable life-experience. Hence the different perspectives of the various religions on the fundamental facts of faith experience like the mystery of God, divine revelation, incarnation, grace, and sacramental rites and worship, to the extent they are genuine and authentic are by their very nature partial and mutually complementary in man's common endeavour to explain the

inexplicable mystery present in his life-experience. Sticking exclusively to any one tradition, even the Christian one, without paying attention to the aspects presented by other traditions in the consideration of any one of the above religious mysteries is a failure in truth, failure to be truly catholic with a in the small key. Even though divine Revelation is the direct self-disclosure of God to man the words, deeds and their narratives are so much restricted in linguistic contexts and cultural parameters that their original experience cannot be arrived at without proper interpretation. But since the interpretations themselves are beset with the same limitations the more interpretations and commentaries are added upon one another the more remote we get from the original experience. The benefit of religious pluralism in this matter is the reflective process by which experiences in different linguistic and cultural situations converge on the ineffable Reality indicated by them.

ii) Ambiguity of 'Religion' and 'Faith'

A fundamental difficulty in understanding what different religions say about life and reality in the context of the experience of the divine is the ambiguity of words like religion and faith which are stereotyped in the Western conceptual framework. Religion is not a Biblical term, and it has been so much reified into a supposedly independent entity in Western usage that W. C. Smith questions its value for understanding especially Eastern traditions. Neo-Reformist Protestant thinkers generally have a negative attitude towards religions, which they consider as purely human effort to arrive at the divine as opposed to divine Revelation in Christ. Bonhoeffer, Gogarten and A. T. van Leeuwen consider religion so much a human contrivance and a matter of external organization that they speak of Christian faith in real opposition to it to be totally devoid of religion. Karl Barth recognizes religion as a bare human possibility, but thinks that man makes such a mess of this possibility producing the very opposite of a positive relation to God that Christian faith means an abolition (*Aufheben* = a pickling up) of it replacing it with grace. Only Gerardus van der Leeuw takes a positive view of religion and views all Christian life as part and parcel of the total human religious effort and also at the same time as God's gift in Christ.

The Catholic theologians in recent times have taken a more positive approach towards non Christian religions. Though they consider "Christianity as the absolute and only religion determined for all mankind", still in view of the universal salvific plan of God until one comes actually to realize the truth of the Gospel, the non-Christian religion in which one finds oneself contains "supernatural moments of that grace which is given to man by God on Christ's account" and for that reason may be acknowledged as a legitimate religion for him. So those who live in non-Christian religions in good faith may be called anonymous Christians and Christ may be said to be present in those religions in an unknown and unrecognized manner.

Here again the important question is what one intends by religion and religious experience both regarding Christianity and other religions, whether religion is taken in the abstract as a system of facts, truths and values, or in the concrete according to the particular practical meaning it has for the individual follower of that religion. In the former sense religion is taken mostly in its external elements and is the subject of comparative religion. But what matters more in this technological age is the latter sense of one's existential concern regarding ultimate meaning. Here both in Christianity as well as in non-Christian religions persons have what may be called peak experiences by which they are brought in contact with the transcendental mystery of God and sometimes face crucial and hopeless situations in which in an agony of faith surrender themselves completely to God. A Christian recognizes this critical experience of faith as an encounter with the Risen Lord, but in other religions too there is a comparable encounter with the Saving God in concrete situations of life. Here religion is defined as it were from within, breaking the rigidity of the traditional concept, adding on to it aspects of meaning implied in the Hindu term Dharma and the Islamic Din. In this sense as W. C. Smith says, even "Christianity is not true absolutely, impersonally, statically, rather, it can become true if and as you or I appropriate it to ourselves and interiorize it in so

far as we live it out from day to day. It becomes true as we take it off the shelf and personalize it.”¹²

iii) The Need for Interfaith Dialogue

But this does not mean that all religions are equal nor that every religiousman has the same religious experience irrespective of what religious tradition he follows. Even in the quest for ultimate meaning in life the different religions do not ask the same questions, nor proceed from the same facts, nor above all have the same goal in view. Hence it will be an oversimplification to say as John Hicks does that the different religions are merely interpenetrating cultural phenomena and that soon they will be interrelated some-what like the different denominations of Christianity.¹³ We shall not say anything here about the possible errors and inaccuracies that can creep into the formulation of any particular religion. Exceptions should not affect the rule of good faith and sincerity with which followers of religions accept their traditions. But regarding truth itself there can be several partial aspects. Buddhism that seeks ultimate meaning in the absolute emptiness of nirvana, Hinduism that looks for identification with the infinite immutable consciousness as one's ultimate Self and the Judeo-Christians that look to the one Creator and Saviour of all men, may be pointing in fact to the same God, but do not evidently have the same divine meaning of life in view. Gautama Buddha starts with the fact that human life is suffering arising out of desire. Hindus see ignorance and clouding of consciousness by the residue of past actions as the main problem, while for Christians men's responsibility in the present situation of sin and corruption to repent and to strive for the establishment of God's kingdom according to the divine plan for human salvation is the main challenge. If for Buddhism the reason for hope is the ineffable aspect of nirvana in the ultimate emptiness and for Hinduism the unity of all beings in the one self of God, the Christian hope is placed

12. *Questions of Religious Truth* (New York, Harper & Row, 1972) p. 68.

13. *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions, Conflicting Truth Claims*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974) pp. 143-49.

in the concrete fact that all men form one family with a single history into which the Son of God inserted himself becoming the son of man in Jesus of Nazareth in order to make the sons of men sons of God. These different insights may be complementary, but they are not the same nor do they have the same impact on the actual lives and activities of men. Hence the need to share one's specific religious experience with men of other traditions remains, and the command of Christ to announce to all men the Good News of the salvation He has gained for all men is valid today as ever.

iv) The Mode of Interfaith Dialogue

a) *Religious Tolerance*: Encounter among religions starts with a sort of coexistence, a political tolerance by which one accepts the existence of other religions as a lesser evil in order to avoid the greater evil of religious wars and disturbance of social order involved in trying to get rid of them. This was the attitude till recent times of Western Christianity towards Judaism, Islam and even towards Christian denominations other than one's own, all of which were considered erroneous and evil. The basic principle was "Error has no right to exist", and hence often the political power was called upon to burn the heretics and exterminate the infidels lest they should constitute a scandal to the faith of the true believers. Even St. Thomas Aquinas defends the policy. Vatican II in its document on religious freedom moved a step forward emphasizing a policy of psychological tolerance, since even the most sublime truths have to be accepted and articulated by the free human consciousness, systems and religions should not be viewed and judged in themselves but one must allow each man to arrive freely at a grasp of truth by himself. This puts common sense before logic and practical necessity before theoretical consistency.

Hinduism that starts with an intuitive experience of the divine reality for basis and views every theoretical formulation and practical prescription a vague and inadequate approximation to the Real, proposes a rational tolerance. As S. Rhadhakrishnan puts it, tolerance of religious systems and traditions one cannot understand is the homage the finite human mind pays to the

infinite reality of the Divine; it is an expression of the reflexive awareness of the limits and limitations of the human mind.

But in this technological age when we take religions as interpretations of life and reality in view of its ultimate meaning and goal, religious tolerance has to reach a theological stage where every authentic religious concept, value and practice has to be understood and accepted as an integral part of man's total religious endeavour. Any rejection of a true element or authentic value even though presented in another religious tradition or in a different idiom is a rejection of the catholicity of truth. Hence any religion or tradition that tries to stand by itself, exclusive of other man's experience, claiming a self-sufficient and privileged position to one's own heritage by that very fact condemns itself as false.

b) Process of Dialogue: The first requisite for meaningful dialogue with other religions is to go beyond one's own narrow linguistic limits and cultural boundaries and get into the other man's hermeneutical cycle: Concepts and propositions, rites and practices taken over from another tradition and looked at with the logic of one's own tradition becomes dislocated, distorted and often meaningless. It is unjust too, like pulling down another man's house to build one's own. This is the fundamental mistake of those who take texts from Scriptures of other religions to use them for reading in our Christian liturgy, and of those who try to borrow yoga as a mere technique to bolster the Christian meditative effort. Every text and practice should be seen in its proper context, the word in the sentence, sentence in the paragraph, paragraph in the chapter, chapter in the book and book itself in the context of the author's complete works or the integrity of the whole tradition. This demands more than journalistic interest in studying another man's religious tradition objectively.

To be fully meaningful this tolerance of other men's faiths has to reach a certain theological level where through incarnation in another's faith one's own faith has to undergo some kind of transformation shedding elements that were taken for granted without proper critical examination as integral parts of one's religious tradition. In this technological age this

sloughing of expendable elements in religion is already taking place. The holocaust of the Hitler era showed that the charity of so called Christians did not actually extend to all men. Gaining of independence by nations in what is today known as the third Church showed how much greed and selfishness were involved in the missionary efforts of the colonial powers. Modern secularity has brought into focus in the competing claims of nationalism and economic imperialism the *matsyanyāya* or the cannibalistic fish-law hidden for long under nobler motives. Even today in several areas where economic exploitation and racial discrimination and apartheid are vigorously practised the oppressors call on the Christian God to justify their inconscionable deeds. In fact even though Christianity left the Jewish particularism opening the windows and doors to the gentiles, to a great extent it replaced it with a Christian brand of particularism. Christians have still to realize that to know the name of God is not some esoteric information but the redemptive presence of God in the world. The New Covenant established in the redemptive blood of Christ is a covenant of the future, setting up the Church as a witnessing community that points to the saving work of God throughout all creation. The Acts of the Apostles shows how the early Church discovered that even the Name of Jesus (Acts 4: 12) is not a magical formula nor a legal code or ideological programme but the disclosure of the pattern of God's action in the world, an encoding of a pattern of new existence by which new being is actualized through the instrumentality of men, a work that is done also by the non-Christians through the names by which they encountered and participated in the Ultimate Reality, continued even in science and technology that strive to remove poverty, disease, inequality and suffering from the world.

v) Particularity and Uniqueness of Religions

But there is a real danger that one can go too far in this dismantling of particularism in the name of universality to the point of throwing out particularity as well along with it. If this is done dialogue itself loses its meaning, since real dialogue is possible only between partners who are conscious of their own identities. Here again modern science with its

strict methodology can give the corrective guidance. Each branch of science has its own particular method of approach and inner logic which it can never abandon in the name of the communality of human knowledge. Every element, molecule and atom has to be studied in its particularity. Each field of science maintaining its identity helps others to grow and build up their identity. Each religion has a certain doctrinal identity emphasizing certain basic facts and methods of religious experience, but especially a historical identity coming at a particular moment in history in a definite socio-cultural context against which alone its authentic contribution to human religiosity can be properly understood. This identity is the basis of its missionary appeal to the rest of humanity.

Some Western Christian theologians in their eagerness to explain the salvific value of other religions have been less than careful in appreciating the particularity and uniqueness of religions, especially of their own faith, Christianity. Thus John B. Cobb jr. in his *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* holds that since the Divine Logos is the inspiring and transforming principle behind all religions Jesus Christ is only a particular expression of the same Logos, suited primarily to the Palestinian cultural context, with plenty of rivals in Buddha, Krishna and others. Gordon Kaufmann states that talk of Christ as the one Saviour of all men is too tall a claim to carry conviction. David Tracy concludes his *Blessed Bage for Order* with the theory that Christ is the authentic representation of the Divine Reality for Christians, but not necessarily for other men. This conception of Christianity as being one religion among many, and of every particular religion as the manifestation of universal religion centered in Logos is quite widespread among Western scholars. What is at issue here is an emphasis of universalism at the expense of particularity, the impossibility of the universal God identifying himself with any particular instance. In this way the decisive meaning of history itself is being challenged.

Western thought is particularly susceptible to this temptation to emphasize universalism at the expense of particularity. Rooted in the Greek philosophy which absolutized abstractions and ideas Western intellectuality has no philosophical tools to

validate the particular. A proper explanation or proof always involves relation to a universal rule or truth. Individuality is significant only as an instance of a class or category. Even history which deals with the course of individual events often tends to become philosophy of history. Hence the tendency to abstract and absolutize the great and decisive deeds of God in history as a sort of universal pattern, transitory and time-space circumscribed manifestations of the Logos, with Jesus Christ as just one particular manifestation among many.

But this universalism without emphasizing the value of particularity implies first of all a radical weakness in metaphysical thinking. Those who refuse to acknowledge the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the one Saviour of all men do so in the name of a certain radical monotheism which will not allow God to be tied down to any particular tradition, culture, or special moment of time. But the meaning of monotheism and of divine transcendence is not merely that the Supreme Being stands above and beyond the limitations of every particular, but also that God is immanent in every particular and can make any particular the moment of his decisive action in time. Hence though the particular is timespace bound and fleeting, it is not mere appearance; every moment and event has a certain irreversible uniqueness. Judaism had such a deep sense of the Transcendent in the events of its particular history that it held that its symbols and myths with all their universalistic import could not fully be rendered in universal term. Every particular event had an irreversible effect on the future of man. Hindus have a mythological concept of history; every religious symbol is the celebration of the divine *lila*, play that makes the world what it is. Though it is play still it is God's play. God's actions to save humanity were presented in the mythological concept of avatars, the different incarnations of God at different times indicated God's effective presence in man's history to respond to man's needs. Hence for Hinduism Krishna is God's incarnation not only for the Hindus but for all men.

The possibility of the transcendent-immanent God to relate himself with the particularity of the space-time moment is the basic supposition of human salvation the possibility for man to pass into the sphere of the life of God. In Christianity

this is expressed in the fact of the Incarnation, this man Jesus of Nazareth is truly the Son of God, the divine Logos, and for that reason the whole human history is centered in him. What happened in Jesus of Nazareth has radically affected the whole human history and man's condition. To universalize the Incarnation and to say that the name of Jesus means simply the disclosure of new being in an Existentialist sense, as it has become the fashion to do with several Western theologians, is to deny the meaning of Christ and Christianity at the same time. To make Christ mean purely new being implying human fulfilment is to say that wherever there is new being there is Christ. Thus to humanize Christ is to make him dispensable. make Christianity another socio-cultural humanizing faith. The unique message of Christianity is Christ, the one Mediator between God and men, who radically altered human history and restored the family of man back into friendship with God. None of the other religions, each of which may have its own unique message to offer to the world, makes the claim to the objective, radical transformation of human history, and if this particularity is lost sight of, Christianity has nothing special to offer.

Hence the object of interfaith dialogue in this age of technology is not merely to see the common denominator in which all religions can be unified, but also to see the different religions in their distinctive individualities mutually constitutive of each other. Dialogue means that each religion has something meaningful to say and something special to offer. Hence religious dialogue is also basically evangelical communicating to others the good news of salvation offered to all men.

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Ganga and Galilee: Hindu and Christian Responses to Truth*

On the banks of the river Ganga, centuries before the Christian era, a particular response was made to the mystery of truth: "Truth is one; sages call it by many names" (*Ekam sat viprāḥ bahudhā vadanti*, Rig Veda I:169). He who went about the shores of Galilee calling disciples to follow him said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Christians in their anxiety to guard the "uniqueness" of the truth vouchsafed to them have tended to regard the Hindu text as advocating an uncritical tolerance towards all approaches to truth. Hindus in affirming what seems to them to be profoundly self-evident have considered the Christian text the breeding ground for an intolerant exclusiveness. The dilemma between truth received by a particular community of faith and truth perceived in the life of neighbours of other communities of faith is a real one which can neither be ignored nor denied. Hindus and Christians, and for that matter people of different faiths and ideologies, have been caught up in this dilemma for a long time. Is it possible for Hindus and Christians to join hands in a common, contemporary quest for truth in order to break out of this dilemma? John Hick rightly says, "We live amidst unfinished business; but we must trust that continuing dialogue will prove to be dialogue into truth, and that in a fuller grasp of truth our present conflicting doctrines will ultimately be transcended." Can dialogue camels take a step or two to cross the desert that separates Ganga and Galilee?

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1. *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions*, Edited by John Hick, Philadelphia, 1974, p. 155.

I

The question of truth has received considerable attention during recent years.² Fresh insights have been gained, new lessons learnt and perhaps the pitfalls and dangers are now more clearly perceived by many than before without retreating into past positions or hindering new adventures. One way of expressing one's gratefulness for the immense labours of fellow workers is to draw out the implications of some of the new insights in one particular area of bilateral relationship, namely the Hindu-Christian. While such attempts are a continuation of the ongoing process of reflection, for various reasons, our particular time seems to be appropriate to engage in this task. There seems to be a quickening of the religious impulse everywhere after years of secular emphasis. Perhaps it is too much to describe the present decade as a "post secular" age, but there is more than passing interest in "living faiths" today. There are signs of revival both within Hinduism and Christianity to indicate that their inner cores are very much alive and that their hold on the minds and hearts of people is not less strong today than before. This is not just because of the enormous number of books that are being published—and these books are not just in English but in many of the Indian languages as well—but also because of new movements which, while breaking out of the traditional confines, nevertheless remain unmistakably Hindu or Christian in their roots. Some of the new religious movements popular in the West which have their origins in the East and Charismatic movements in Christianity are examples of this.

Further Hinduism today is no longer confined to one country—India There are significant Hindu communities in

2. See for example: W. C. Smith *Questions of Religious Truth*, London, 1967 esp. Ch. III, "Can Religions be True or False"? pp. 65 ff; *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions*, Ed., John Hick, Philadelphia, 1974; *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World*, Ed. Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman, Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, 1977; John A. T. Robinson, *Truth is Two-Eyed*, London, 1979; "A Hindu-Christian Dialogue on Truth" by Klaus K. Klostermaier in *Man's Religious Quest*, Ed. White-field Foy London, 1978; "On Truth: A Hindu Perspective" by K. L. Sheshagiri Rao. in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 20, No. 4, October 1970, pp. 377 ff; etc.

many parts of the world—Great Britain, U. S. A., Canada, Europe, Africa, the Caribbean etc. No study of contemporary Hinduism can afford to ignore the “diaspora” Hindu communities which are often more free from the restrictions of the past and the heavy hand of caste and custom than similar communities in the motherland. In the Christian world whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant, Christians from Asia and Africa are making more effective contributions to the spiritual life, theological thinking, ways of worship, religious art forms, and the struggle for justice than ever before. Therefore in the larger ecumenical context this puts Hindu-Christian dialogue on a wider and more equal basis than is possible in national contexts, for example in a country like India, where because Christians are such a small minority any Hindu-Christian dialogue looks like a debate between an elephant and a bullock

But there is perhaps another reason why common quest for truth is more appropriate and urgent today. A mere academic discussion on the concept of truth or a comparison between Hindu and Christian “notions” of truth is not particularly helpful when both Hindus and Christians—as well as their neighbours—are caught up in a worldwide struggle against injustice. The choice is not between the quest for truth and the struggle for justice. The question is how our understanding of and obedience to truth critically illumines and directs our struggle for justice in order that human beings might become free. Truth and justice are related. Ignorance (*avidyā*) is bondage; sin is slavery. Both the Hindu and the Christian heritages strongly emphasise the liberating power of truth in human life and history. Therefore joining hands in the quest for truth has consequences for the continuing struggle for justice as well. And because of the transforming power of truth the relation between people engaged in the quest for truth should—and will—change. Moltmann therefore is right in emphasising “hope in relationships”.³ It is only out of “the growing web of living relationships that something new can come into being for a wider community”.⁴

3. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, SCM Press, London, 1977, p. 13.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

II

It is not the intention here to give a systematic exposition of Hindu and Christian understandings of truth and draw a list of similarities and differences. Many such expositions are already available and, in any case, it is impossible to speak of the Hindu or the Christian notions of truth when within each heritage there are different ways of interpreting scripture and tradition. Admittedly, brief references are certainly necessary. What may be helpful is to consider the responses to truth in relation to the basic attitudes implied in them towards the mystery of human existence. Not that differences do not matter; but the more important question seems to be what is behind these differences and how, in spite of differences and without making any artificial attempts to minimise them, the common concern for truth can bring Hindus and Christians together in order to keep dialogue going and to develop a genuine community of discourse in the coming years.

The Hindu response to truth considered here is limited to *Vedānta*—both non-theistic and theistic (*advaita* and *dvaita*). Holding these two attitudes together is important at least for two reasons. First, it shows that within the long tradition of Hinduism itself there are at least two ways of responding to truth. (There are other ways too, for example the secular (*chārṇaka*) element in Hinduism). Second, because in spite of repeated emphases and scholarly pleadings by Hindu neighbours many Christians have a tendency to regard all Hindu thought as ‘impersonal’ or ‘monistic’. Even the contrasting terms ‘personal’ and ‘impersonal’ do less than justice to the complexity and depth of Hindu concern. Perhaps the terms ‘supra-personal’ or ‘transpersonal’ are more adequate. Quite a few Christian theologians seem to be closer to the Upanishads than to the Bible in their ‘doctrines’ of God, sometimes without being aware of it.⁵ The *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavadgita* which constitute the triple canon (*prasthāna traya*)

5. See the chapter by Santosh Chandran Sen Gupta, ‘The Misunderstanding of Hinduism’ in *Truth and Dialogue*, Ed. John Hick, pp. 96 ff; K. L. Sheshagiri Rao, *The Concept of Śraddha*, Motilal Banarsidas Delhi, 1974, pp. 124 ff; John B. Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja*, Yale, 1974, pp. 176 ff.

of Hindu life and thought have texts which support both theistic and non theistic responses to truth.⁶ All schools of Vedānta, however, have certain points in common. The non-theistic school of Shankara (*advaita*) to which greater attention is paid in the West, perhaps because it is easier to contrast it with Christian thought, emphasises certain basic points. Ultimate truth, *sat*, identified with the Brahman, is one. It is one without a second (*ekam evādvitīyam*).⁷ This oneness (*ekatva*), however, is not undifferentiated monism. That is, in its depths, this unique one-ness is non-dual (*advaita*, not-two). Brahman is pure being, consciousness and bliss (*sat, cit, ānanda*). The quest for the Brahman should start from within because Brahman and the inner self (*ātman*) are one; they are not two. The individual person is in ignorance (*avidyā*) of this truth. This is bondage to falsehood in a world which is not ultimately real (*māya*). Liberation (*mokṣa*) is the realisation of this truth, the re-establishment of the self in its true being – *Ātman/Brahman*. The disciplined path of *yoga* is the way to this saving knowledge. “He who knows the Brahman becomes the Brahman. In his family no one who does not know the Brahman will be born. He overcomes grief. He overcomes sin. Free from the fetters of the heart he becomes immortal.”⁸

Theistic *Vedānta* also accepts the Brahman as ultimate reality, but there is a difference in interpreting the relation of

6. For an exposition of the non theistic view see A. C. Krishna Warriar, “The Nature of Ultimate Truth—an advaitic view” in *Religion and Society*, Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, Vol. IX, No. 3, Sept. 1962, pp. 14 ff; for an exposition of the theistic view see K. Sivaraman, “The meaning of Moksha in Contemporary Hindu Thought and Life” in *Living Faiths and Ultimate Goals*, Ed. S. J. Sarmatha, Geneva, 1974, pp. 2 ff. For original texts in Sanskrit and in translation see D. S. Sharma, *The Upanishads: An Anthology*, Bhavan series, Bombay, 1961, esp. introduction pp. 1-31 and *The Vedic Experience Mantramajari*, ed. R. Panikkar, Dayton, Longman and Todd, London, 1977. This is perhaps the most comprehensive collection of Hindu texts in recent years prepared under the Direction of a profound and perceptive thinker.

7. *Katha*, Up. 2:1.

8. *Mundaka* Up. III, ii, 9.
(3)

the Brahman to the world on the one hand and to the individual soul on the other.⁹ It identifies the Brahman with *Viṣṇu* the personal God who can be addressed as "Thou". The Brahman is described as the highest person (*puruṣottama*).¹⁰ He is also described as the "indweller" (*antaryāmin*) of both the world and the individual soul.¹¹ He bestows grace (*prasāda*) on creatures and restores them to their true nature. Communion with God can be obtained through the path of devotion (*bhakti*). God in his concern for his creatures descends to the realm of history from time to time in order to destroy injustice (*adharma*) and to establish righteousness (*dharma*). The theistic quest for liberation transforms and incorporates the way of knowledge (*jnāna*) into the way of devotion (*bhakti*). The quest for truth therefore is through the devotion of the heart (*bhaktirūpāpāna-jnāna*). But there is even a better way, going beyond the three well known ways of knowledge, devotion and works, and that is the way of unqualified and absolute surrender to God (*prapatti*). In what is probably his most beautiful prose-poem (*Saranāgati gadya*), Ramanuja, the chief exponent of theistic school, pours out his heart in an act of absolute self-surrender to God.

Pointing out that the theistic and non-theistic approaches to truth in Hindu thought should not be regarded as contradictory or mutually exclusive a contemporary Hindu scholar makes the following observation: 'Both personalistic and impersonal conceptions of the supreme truth find their cause and explanation in Brahman. Brahman is the whole Truth. It is immanent and transcendent, dynamic and static, personal and impersonal. These qualities appear to be incompatible to our limited minds but in Brahman all of them become meaningful.

This brief discussion on *Vedānta* referring to theistic and non-theistic traditions emphasises the point made earlier that

9. See M. Yamunacharya, *Ramanuja's Teachings in His own Words*, Bhavan Series, Bombay, 1963; See also John B. Carman, *op. cit.*, pp. 65 ff.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

within Hinduism itself there are *different* ways of responding to the truth. But moving out of one particular tradition into the area of Hindu-Christian dialogue, can the principle be extended to cover the Christian way also? Since truth is One and God is Truth there cannot obviously be a Hindu Truth and a Christian Truth. Therefore can one extend the Hindu attitude to include the Christian response to truth as well? To many Hindus and perhaps some Christians it may not be difficult to accept this view. But since our context is the community of discourse and the continuation on dialogue with integrity one must not ignore the fact that many Christians and some Hindus will not find it easy to accept this possibility. Religious commitments are not the result of logical inferences. One should not forget that in spite of centuries of co-existence and in spite of the general spirit of tolerance there are tension between different traditions (*sampradayas*) within Hinduism. No one who has read the exegetical comments of Shankara and Ramanuja on the same texts of Hindu scriptures can fail to see the intensity of religious emotion that is behind subtle linguistic analysis and theological interpretation emphasising the difference between the two. These differences do matter. They are important to religious life and commitment. These convictions continue to be held and cherished even to this day and sometimes give rise to tensions in the community. When it is life together in the larger multi-religious society a principle of co-existence accepted within a particular community of faith after many centuries of controversy cannot be too quickly extended to cover relations with other communities of faith. This is true of Christians as well. After centuries of conflict Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants are moving slightly beyond co-existence, and denomination within Protestantism are seeking to work together in the ecumenical movement. The so-called "confessional families" - Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed - have their own notions of "theological truth"; otherwise there does not seem to be much justification for them both to be within the ecumenical movement and, at

12. K. L. Sheshagiri Rao, "On Truth: A Hindu Perspective" in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 20, No. 4, October 1970, p. 381.

the same time, to continue their separate existence. But any talk of extending the principle beyond the Christian boundaries by referring to "larger ecumenism" is frowned upon by many Christians. Therefore, one should not attempt too quickly to resolve the tension that exists between different responses to truth, within Hindu or Christian or between them.

There is, however, a certain degree of agreement between the Hindu and the Christian in what may be described as "shared concerns" in this area. Both recognise that question of truth is not a matter of propositions or of intellectual enquiry, but expends on a vision (*dṛiṣṭi*) or the inner response of the whole persons to Ultimate Reality - Truth. The categories of "revelation" in Christianity and "realisation" in Hinduism should not be unnecessarily contrasted. Even when the divine initiative in revelation is acknowledged the element of human consciousness in responding to revelation cannot be ignored. So too, even where 'intuition' (*anubhava*) is emphasised elements of divine freedom and grace are present to make realisation actual in life. Further, the liberating power of truth is acknowledged by both. Christians believe that truth revealed in Jesus Christ has the power to make men and women free from the bondage of sin: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know that truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31, 32). To the Hindu the knowledge of the Brahman - "the truth of the truth" (*satyasya satyam*) (*Bṛihad Up.* II i, 20) - is not just for intellectual enlightenment; it leads to freedom in the highest sense (*mokṣa*). Therefore we must conclude that truth that dispels ignorance (*avidyā*) and truth that liberates humanity from sin cannot be unrelated. Moreover, both recognize the primacy of Ultimate Truth and therefore the contingent or relative character of the world in which the quest for truth is pursued. *Māya* to the Hindu denotes not so much that the world is "illusion" but that its reality can only be regarded as "dependent" reality. The Biblical doctrine of creation strongly emphasises that all creation is dependent on God the Creator. This point is of crucial importance in discussing the relation between absolute truth and relative truth.

However, the crucial difference between the Hindu and Christian responses to truth centres around the Biblical understanding of God and his revelation in Jesus Christ as witnessed to in the New Testament. Undoubtedly, there is a supra-personal element in the Biblical understanding of God as well. There is a certain "mystery", an "unknowability" in God to which human response can only be of humility and silence. Nevertheless, the God of the Bible is a God who enters into a covenant relation with people. This would be impossible without the personal dimension.¹³ "Son of Man, stand upon your feet and I will speak with you" (Ezekiel, 2:1). The Hebrew word for truth (*emeth*) denotes a Reality which is firm, solid, valid and binding. The emphasis is not so much on truth as *being* as on truthfulness, trustworthiness, dependability at all times, no matter what happens. Even when people break the covenant, God on his side remains faithful. In the New Testament, too, the personal relation between Jesus Christ and his disciples with whom a new covenant is established is important for their receiving and growing in truth. The Greek word for truth (*aletheia*) etymologically denotes "non-concealment", which means truth is that which is seen, expressed, disclosed or which discloses itself, and so by implication that which is real. Truth is also regarded as an aspect of *logos*; it is the essential task of *logos* to express, to disclose, to reveal. When Jesus Christ says, "I am the way, the truth and the life", the inference is that he is the answer to "the question of true being in the absolute sense, which man must know if he is to find his way in his puzzling existence."¹⁴ Truth in Jesus Christ is also connected with grace, life and light (John 1:1-14). This strongly personal character of the Christian response to truth cannot be ignored. By no stretch of imagination can "I and the Father are one" (John 1:30) and "That art thou" (Chand. VI, 3-14) be identified. The question is not whether the personal and impersonal are aspects of truth or can be transcended but whether the category of the personal

13. For a discussion on the covenant in the context of religious pluralism see Donald G. Dawe, *op. cit.* pp. 8 ff.

14. For an elaborate discussion on Truth in the N.T. see *The Dictionary of the New Testament*, Ed. G. Kittel, Tr. G. W. Bombay, Grand Rapids, 1969, Vol. I. pp. 232 ff.

is ultimately significant in the quest for and response to truth. But in the Hindu-Christian context this leads to a further question which cannot be avoided. Does God reveal himself as truth only in Jesus Christ? Hindu friends point out that if the human and the historical character of Jesus is so strongly emphasised as it is in the New Testament, how can the possibility of God disclosing himself in other human beings and at other times in history be closed? If God is love as Christians believe he cannot be partial. If God is free how can his freedom to act at all times in history be limited by an arbitrary "once-for-all-ness". To say that this is God's "self-limitation" does not solve the problem because the question still remains: why a limitation in this one particular instance?

III

The points made so far may be recapitulated here. (1) Hindu and Christian responses to truth have developed separately, but a common quest for truth is now important not just for the sake of truth itself but also for the sake of right relations between Hindus and Christians. (2) The quest for truth and the struggles for justice should not be regarded as alternatives; they are related. The former illumines, supports and directs the latter. The latter brings an element of existential urgency to the former. (3) Within Hinduism there are both theistic and non-theistic responses to truth. Therefore it would be doing less than justice to the totality of Hindu life if the Christian response to truth is contrasted only with the non-theistic view. (4) Hindus and Christians share certain basic attitudes towards truth but there are also fundamental differences between them. In the last analysis, these differences are centred around Jesus Christ. A dialogue between Hindus and Christians on Jesus Christ might lead to the question of truth, but a debate on the questions of truth is unlikely to lead to a discussion of Jesus Christ. Recognising the integrity of the two responses, and without minimising the differences, what then are the possibilities of continuing Hindu-Christian discussions into the future? One cannot construct an over-arching framework because no one can stand outside his or her particular commitments. It is truth which transcends

differences in human understanding. An appreciation of the differences might lead to the discovery of hitherto undiscovered or ignored dimensions of received truth within one's own heritage. The possibility of discovering 'other ways to state the truth' is recognized in a recent statement adopted by the Faith and order Commission of the World Council of Churches. "To live in hope is to risk *dialogue*. Genuine encounter with others can challenge us to vacate positions of special privilege and render ourselves vulnerable. To enter into dialogue with people of other faiths is to risk having one's own faith shaken and to discover that there are other ways to state the truth than we have yet learned ourselves ... Because in dialogue we can receive a fuller understanding of our own faith and a deeper understanding of our neighbours, hope is not afraid of dialogue."¹⁵ Are there then openings at which the two views can complement each other? What are some of the points that need to be considered on the way towards this "dialogue into truth"?

There are several points which can be briefly touched here. There is the question of the relation between the Absolute and the relative. This inevitably touches the relation between particular religions in a pluralist world. Further, there is the need for growth in truth, growth in maturity, not just in the separate ways of particular communities, but through sharing the common life, through struggle and suffering, through mutual criticism and mutual enrichment. The sense of self-sufficiency and of exclusiveness need to be broken so that there could be an openness, a willingness to share, a genuine feeling of needing the other. It is not so much the possession as the sharing of truth that leads to enrichment. Moreover, there is the question not just of responding to or of understanding truth, but of participating in truth, "doing" the truth in the ongoing life of the community. *Satya* is related to *dharma*, truth to truthfulness, Here the knowledge of truth and the obligation to love one's neighbour mingle together. Life in God is life in love.

15. *Sharing in One Hope Commission of Faith and Order*, Bangalore, 1978, World Council of Churches Geneva, p. 10.

In any genuine divine-human encounter the absolutely other is experienced as the most intimate within. This other relativises everything else. In fact, the willingness to accept such relativisation is probably the only guarantee that one has encountered the other as ultimately Real. A recognition of human finitude should lead us to acknowledge the inescapable relativity of all human consciousness. All human responses to the Absolute, whether conceived of as the Brahman or as God who reveals himself, must be recognized as relative. Divine truth is always received in earthen vessels. How can it be otherwise? No one who is part of a particular community of faith shaped by certain linguistic, social and historical factors, can escape this cultural relativity. The Word must be *heard*, the vision of God must be *seen*, the truth perceived must become truth in the life of believers. People of different cultures at different times respond differently to the mystery of truth. "It is not that one people's explanation contains more truth than that of another, but that a different *kind* of truth is demanded in different cultures at different times."¹⁶ The Hindu, while recognizing that this world is relative (*māya*), cannot claim absolute validity to one particular experience within it, namely, the realization: 'I am Brahman.' The Christian, while emphasizing the "historicity" of Jesus Christ and while affirming that Jesus Christ is authentically human, cannot ignore the fact that in the incarnation, God relativises himself, that is, there is a prior relativising of Truth, even before human consciousness, culture and history start relativising what is received. Burkle rightly observes, "To say that the Christian revelation is relative is not to deny the absoluteness of the divine truth which is revealed therein. It is to deny the absoluteness of what any creature apprehends of divine truth"¹⁷

Quite often, the Hindu text is interpreted to mean that all particular religions float without a rudder in a sea of relativism. While Christians have far too quickly come to this

16. John V. Taylore, *The Go Between God*, SCM Press, London, 1972, p. 184.

17. "Jesus Christ and Religious Pluralism" article by Howard R. Burkle in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol.16, Summer 1979, No. 3, p. 460.

conclusion Hindu interpreters have often given room for such an interpretation. Sometimes absolute validity is claimed for this particular "relative" view. A relativism which makes no room for commitment undermines the very basis of authentic religious life. It leads to theological confusion and spiritual poverty. It even makes dialogue unnecessary. If all religions are equally true what is the necessity of dialogue? While absolute claims cannot be made for relative apprehensions of truth, particular religious responses can be true only so far as they reflect or partake in something of the truth and lead people towards it. What is important here is not whether one or the other is false, but the distinctiveness of each of the responses. In the core of any religion, including Hinduism and Christianity, there is something which belongs to it alone, separately, distinctively, decisively. It is this which makes each religion "unique" and precludes any one claiming "uniqueness" for itself excluding the other. Therefore a particular religion can claim to be decisive for some people or some people can claim that a particular religion is decisive for them, but no religion is justified in claiming that it is decisive for all. The Hindu and the Christian have their own particularly distinctive contributions to make to the common quest for truth. "Relativity" in this sense does not undermine religious life, but strengthens and mutually enhances the quality of the quest. "Religions are relative because they are special and distinctive", says Burkle. "The very qualities which disqualify their claims of absoluteness make each religion precious and irreplaceable."¹⁸

Dialogue into truth should also mean growth in truth in the sense that through dialogue opportunities for participation in truth are enhanced, openings to further dimensions of truth are increased, and the obligation to be committed and loyal to what has been received becomes more compelling. Hinduism and Christianity developed separately during the centuries and shaped their own profiles without much mutual influence on each other. It is only in recent centuries that Hindus and Christians have been thrown together in the world community. A willingness to come together not always in controversy but in critical dialogue is still more recent, but

18. *Op. Cit.*, p. 464.

offers immense possibilities for the future. Therefore in spite of difficulties and set backs we should confidently work together in community hoping to grow together in truth

The popular notion that truth is something static, something sitting rock-like and steady out there, for people below to look at and respond should be rejected. Truth is not a mount Everest with its peak in the clouds challenging people of different nationalities to climb it or to take photographs from below. Knitter points out that the classical outlook reflected in the New Testament and in Western thought until the Enlightenment assumed that truth could be only one and unchanging and so normative for all, whereas modern historical consciousness regards all statements about truth to be in process, subject to many expressions, and so not normative in the "once-for-all" sense.¹⁹ The very word *Brahman* (from the root *Brih* = to grow) indicates that the Hindu conceptions of truth is not static. The theistic notion of *avatars* means that God is never unconcerned with history, but *whenever* necessity arises he will interfere in different ways. To the Christian, God is "the living God", constantly active in history. There is the promise of Jesus Christ, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16: 13). Therefore the possibilities of growing in truth already revealed and of receiving fresh insights into truth cannot be discounted. There are indeed possibilities of error as well. *Avidya* and sin are far from being defeated. Therefore mutual corrections should not be excluded. Sometimes the pride of self-sufficiency can deceive us to ignore the fact that our formulations of truth might be precariously near to "untruth".

This growing together cannot always be a smooth, "non-disputational" process. It is often difficult: sometimes it may have to be broken off in order to allow ragged edges to heal

19. Paul Knitter, "World Religions and the Finality of Christ", A Critique of Hans Kung's "On being a Christian" in *Horizons*, 5/2 1978, pp. 153 ff. See also "The Transition from a Classicist World View to Historical Mindedness" in *The Role of the Law in the Church Today*, Ed. J. Biechler, Baltimore, U.S.A., 1967, pp. 126 ff.

and disturbed relations to mend. Time and space are necessary for people to become more open both to each other and to new visions of reality. In any case, growing in truth will demand rejection or distortions of truth about each other, distortions which may even be close to untruth and which may sometimes amount to giving false witness against one's neighbour. The attitude of seeming tolerance in the Hindu text sometimes hides a subtle sense of exclusiveness which coopts everybody else into its framework. Already in the debate between non-theistic and theistic traditions this attitude comes out. The distinction which Shankara makes between transcendental (*pāramārthika*) and practical (*vyāvahārika*) puts the personal God on a lower level than the Brahman. Ramanuja protested against this notion of levels in religious life and argued for the reality of the personal, pointing out that finite truth may be a fraction of reality, but nevertheless is still truth and that therefore it cannot be relegated to the lower levels to be transcended into the higher. Radhakrishna wrote, "The worshippers of the Absolute are the highest in rank, second to them are the worshippers of the personal God." This immediately puts Christians and those Hindus who worship God as personal in the second rank. How can there be genuine dialogue between people of the "highest" and the "second" rank. Swami Vivekananda interprets the methodology of Jesus Christ himself in terms of gradation - to the masses he taught about a personal God, to those "who could grasp a higher idea" he spoke in terms of vine and the branches, but to his disciples, (presumably not withstanding that some of them were fishermen), he proclaimed the highest truth "I and my Father are One".²¹ From within the Christian tradition this interpretation would amount to distortion. Quite often, Christians too are guilty of distorting cherished Hindu convictions. Both Hindus and Christians should listen to each other's genuine voices and reject distortions which have roots in by-gone era. We cannot embark on a journey into the future with the cumbersome baggage of the past.

20 S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, Macmillan, New York, 1927, p. 32.

21. *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, 7th edition, Almora, India, 1946-47, Voll. II, p. 143.

Without a genuinely felt need, and some sense of incompleteness mutual enrichment and mutual criticism would be impossible. While the notion of Christianity becoming "a critical catalyst" in a religiously plural world sounds promising²², the reciprocal possibility of other religions also influencing Christianity not just in its cultural expressions, but in some of its inner attitudes as well should not be minimised. A recognition of "the creative need for the other" cannot, and should not be one sided. In the context of Hindu Christian relations, "Christianity could correct its all-too-anthropomorphic ideas of God the Father in the light of the reverent, more or less trans-personal (better than "impersonal") understanding of God on the part of the Asian religions..."²³ In a recent book appropriately entitled "Truth is Two Eyed", Robinson speaks of "an elliptical model of reality" and the need to look at truth through "two eyes" as it were in order to overcome the limitations and distortions that come from the more familiar habit of looking at truth with only one eye.²⁴ Western Christians - and many Christians in Asia and Africa also are *Western* Christians in their blinkered vision of Christ - can perhaps change and expand their vision by looking at truth through Hindu eyes. It may help as a corrective to a predominantly one sided view; it may carry with it "a challenge, explicitly to any kind of exclusiveness and implicitly to any claim of uniqueness"; and it may allow "a wider vision not merely to correct but also to complement one's own rather parochial faith - in other words, to make it more catholic."²⁵ This openness, sensitivity and willingness to learn from neighbours of other faiths is very refreshing and holds great promise for Hindu Christian relations. To the Hindu this is the "eye" of inner vision (*dṛṣṭi*, *darśana*), the vision of reality, intuitively experienced within the cave of the heart. Klostermaier's imaginary conversation between Krishnadas and Anastasios²⁶ clearly brings out the changes in understanding and transformation in attitudes that take place in the partners as the conversation on truth proceeds. Krishnadas discovers that his Christian partner was not suggesting that because he found truth in Jesus Christ, truth was not to be found among those who are outside Christianity. Anastasios is impressed by the Hindu insistence on discipline (*sādhana*), the intense longing for truth, the need for renunciation, the inter-action between positive endeavour and negative detachment to keep the seeker

22. Jurgen Moltmann, *ibid.*, pp. 158 ff; also Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, Collins, London, 1977, pp. 110 ff.

23. Hans Küng: *ibid.*, p. 113.

24. John A. T. Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 15 ff.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 24. 26. *Op. cit.*, pp. 685 ff.

after truth going forward. He observes that perhaps the "best we can expect from humanity is not to have Truth but really to want it to be sincere and open for it."²⁷

The practice of truth cannot be divorced from the quest for truth. In the Hindu tradition *dharma* and *satya* are closely related. "Verily, that which is *dharma* is truth. Therefore, they say of a man who speaks *dharma*, that he speaks the truth for verily these two are one and the same."²⁸ The Christian emphasis is not just on knowledge of God, but on obedience to God, not just on knowing the truth, but on doing the truth. Obedience to truth has moral consequences. Unless the Hindu-Christian quest for truth is related to the ongoing life of the community, to the life of people who are struggling, suffering and dying in the world today it will remain isolated. True enlightenment has social responsibility of truth as objective reality that by "becoming true" Hindus or Christians should "prove" the truthfulness of their responses. Truth as objective reality is independent of subjective manifestations. God does not become less faithful because people become disobedient. A Mahatma Gandhi does not prove the "truth-claims" of Hinduism any more than a Martin Luther King proves the "truth-claims" of Christianity. They both participate in and obey the truth in using and being used by the liberating power of truth against all kinds of falsehood and injustice. It is not without significance that Mahatma Gandhi described his *Autobiography* as *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Both suffered and became martyrs to truth. The quest for truth in this sense therefore cannot be separated from willingness to suffer and no one can be willing to suffer without love.

To continue in dialogue in the larger community requires not just a willingness to talk about truth or a readiness to join hands in the struggle against all falsehood. It demands both the love of truth and love towards the neighbour. "The only principle of inter religious dialogue is truth", said Swami Abhishiktananda, "the only way for it to succeed is love. It does not aim at shaking the convictions of anybody. Its results must be only to confront more vividly each of the participants with truth."²⁹

S. J. Samartha

27. *Ibid.*, p. 694.

28. Brihad Up. I., 4:14, also *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Ed. Th. de Bary, New York, 1960, p 241.

29. Abhishiktananda, quoted by J.A.T. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 6-7.

Christian Theology and Religious Dialogue

The times in which we live can rightly be characterised as an age of dialogue. Modern life takes more and more the pattern of dialogue, ultimately pointing to a new style of existence itself. Naturally, this dialogical mode of existence has also implications for our religious commitment which is an integral dimension of human experience having meaning and relevance only as part of the total human experience. This article is meant to be an attempt to spell out some of the basic presuppositions of the dialogical nature of religiosity today as well as the characteristics of the emerging religious consciousness seeking to find its expression in theological thinking.

1. The Emerging World-Consciousness

Experience and reality have certain mutual correspondence. Experience discovers reality and reality nourishes experience and the meeting point of both is enlightened by the flame of consciousness. The more we experience and know about reality, the wider and deeper our consciousness becomes. As consciousness has a unifying function inasmuch as it can embrace a variety of objects at the same time or successively, so also there exists a basic unity that binds all that is real contemporaneously as well as historically. Even without discussing the isomorphism of knowledge and reality as far as unity is concerned, one can point to the basic unity of reality from other sources such as philosophy, physics, and mysticism.¹

1. The Platonic tradition of philosophy, especially the version of Plotinus is very impressive from the point of view of the vision of unity. In modern times, the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead can be pointed out as remarkable for its emphasis on the category of unity. According to Whitehead, the universe is an organic whole, where "the plan of the whole influences the very characters of the various sub-

However, the category of unity has no real meaning except in the world of plurality and the meaning has to be taken not as totally accomplished but partly as a goal to be attained. Both unity and plurality are polarly related and this relationship has certain dialogical tone in its very structure. To be in this world of polarity between oneness and plurality, of universality and particularity, is to have a dialogical kind of existence - an existence which implies individuality without isolation from that which is not oneself.² The dialogical way of being in existence has a double face, namely, contemporaneity and historicity. The former means one's bonds with all that is real in the present contemporary instance, whereas the latter implies the bonds with all that has been in the past and all

ordinate organisms which enter into it" (A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, New York: The Free Press, 1967, p. 79; cf. also *idem*, *Religion in the Making*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1927, p. 94). Modern physics too subscribes to the perspective of cosmic unity (Cf. F. Capra *The Tao of Physics*, New York: Bantam Book 1977, p. 57). For the mystic vision of unity both in the Western and Eastern traditions, see Rudolf Otto, *West - Oestliche Mystik* (GTB Siebenstern 312, 1979) pp. 43 ff; cf. also Gustav Mensching, *Der Offene Tempel: Die Weltreligionen im Gespräch miteinander* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1974), p. 233.

2. Reality is characterized by a dialogical polarity on various levels. Panikkar states that "wisdom reaches its pinnacle in a happy commingling of universal and concrete, intellectual and vital, masculine and feminine, divine and human..." (R. Panikkar, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press, 1978, p. 14), and that "the identity our age so frantically seeks is not individuality (which ends in solipsism), nor generality (which ends in alienation), but the awareness of that constitutive reality which makes of us but connections in the mysterious warp and woof of being" (*ibid.*, p. 4). Elsewhere Panikkar is more emphatic and considers it even false to think of Man as an individual: "Den Menschen als Individuum betrachten zu wollen, ist meines Erachtens völlig unzureichend und letztlich sogar falsch" (R. Panikkar, 'Der Mythos der Zukunft' in *Zukunft der Theologie, Theologie der Zukunft*, O. Betz, J. Blank et al., Vienna: Herder, p. 25).

that will be in the future. In short, we can say that which is real is related to all that has been, is, and will be real and this relationship is not an external embellishment but constitutive of being as such. This awareness is the kernel of the world-consciousness we are speaking of, and the more one becomes aware of the world of reality, the wider the range of this world-consciousness grows. In the following reflections on Christian theology with reference to religious dialogue the concept of world-consciousness will play a key role.

2. Religion and world-consciousness

Religiousness which is only one aspect, the most important one no doubt, of the total human experience has a tendency to assert itself eclipsing the other aspects of human experience.³ One can certainly grant a leading role to the religious perceptions in harmonizing the various dimensions of experience. However, if at the wake of the religious experience other aspects of human reality are thrown into total or partial eclipse, such religious experience would tend to dehumanize man, denying his real humanity. As Sabbath is for man and not man for Sabbath, so religion is for man and not man for religion.

Now, the tendency of religion to tear itself off from the harmony of the whole and dominate the scene can embody itself in the collective consciousness of a people and their history, their religious experience and theology. Here religion becomes an organized force and takes up a dominant role subjugating the lives of people as a group and further lords it over nations. Falling in line with this, theology advances

3. What Whitehead said about this tendency of religion is worth pondering over: "... religion bases itself primarily upon a small selection from the common experiences of the race. On this side, religion ranges itself as one among other specialized interests of mankind whose truths are of limited validity. But on its other side, religion claims that its concepts, though derived primarily from special experiences are yet of universal validity, to be applied by faith to the ordering of all experience" (A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, Cambridge, 1926, p. 21).

claims which would affirm the uniqueness of that religious group giving it a position superior to other religions. The consciousness of the Old Testament people that they were specially elected by Yahweh and the heir of special privileges and promises can be pointed out as the expression of such a consciousness. In the New Testament Jesus becomes the centre of a similar attitude in this sense that he is acclaimed to be the only Saviour and baptism the only means to salvation. Christian theology in its beginnings helped the explicitation and defence of this attitude of self-assertion, and we find this trend in the New Testament itself. In such a situation there takes place easily what Panikkar calls the 'extrapolation' of thought beyond the scope of its original application.⁴ When Paul speaks about the gentiles, he speaks in such universal terms as to be applicable to all the gentiles of all times. But we realize today that what Paul spoke of gentiles cannot be applied to all the gentiles everywhere, not, for example, to the Hindus and Buddhists. Panikkar points out that in fact "Biblical scholarship today does not insist that the entire planet was under water in Noah's time or in utter darkness at the crucifixion of Christ."⁵

Now, the tendency of theology and religious thought to extrapolate in an *a priori* way should be overcome in order to be of real service to religious dialogue. This is possible only

4. Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Intra religious Dialogue*, p. 68.

5. *Ibid.* For such an extrapolation of thought, the traditional philosophy of religion is a good example. Panikkar writes: "What is termed philosophy of religion is usually a particular philosophy of a particular religion expressed in more or less vague or universal terms and then applied almost *a priori* to all other 'religions' of the world" (*op. cit.*, p. 65). To point out an example, almost all Western philosophers of religion define religion in terms of Man's relationship with a supra-human power (cf. H. J. Schoeps, *Religion: Wesen und Geschichte*, Munich: Wilhelm Goldman Verlag, 1979, p. 13) B. Welte, *Religionsphilosophie*, Herder, 1979, p. 28), whereas a religion like Buddhism cannot be defined in those terms. Buddha's attitude towards God was a pronounced silence if not a denial.

by the help of a world-consciousness which is able to perceive the validity and legitimacy of other religious traditions in the history of mankind and relate them together into a whole on the basis of their underlying unity, at the same time without overlooking their concrete differences.⁶ If there emerges a religious consciousness deep and wide enough to embrace all the religions and religious outlooks of mankind, even the contradictory ones, that consciousness can prepare the individual religions for a dialogical existence and can work out a theology helpful for dialogue.

3. Christian Theology: a wider perspective

Christian theology of the past has been somewhat apologetic and dogmatic,⁷ and today the wider awareness resulting

6. In the midst of fierce crusades against the 'pagans', Nicolaus of Cusa in the 15th century held the view that all religions were basically one. He made the distinction between one religion and diverse religious customs (cf. Gustav Mensching, *op. cit.*, p. 42). In the theological thinking of today, it is perhaps Panikkar who represents this trend of thought more than others. According to him, religions are like the various colours "that appear once the divine or the simply white light of reality falls on the prism of human experience" (R. Panikkar, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, p. xx). Elsewhere he speaks about "that one mystery" which underlies all religious rites and traditions (*ibid.*, p. 15), or of the "ultimate religious fact" present everywhere and in every religion (*ibid.* p. 57) and of 'Man's religious root' which "grows, flowers and gives fruit in the most multiform way" (*ibid.*, p. 56). From this conviction, Panikkar could distinguish between three levels of religion: R^1 , R^2 and R^3 according to which R^3 is the level of mystery representing the basic unity (cf. R. Panikkar and A. Koothottil, "Man and Religion: A Dialogue with Panikkar", *Jeevadhara* 61, 1981, p. 16).

7. The dogmatic 'bias' of Christian theology is one of the main hindrances for a genuine religious dialogue. Only by getting rid of that bias can Christian theology truly become part of human knowledge. In this connection, the comparison Whitehead once drew between the scientists and theologians is really striking: "For years they [scientists] have been wel-

from a closer contact with other religions has softened down its tone considerably. No serious theologian would think today that the non-Christian religions are the work of the devil and that the 'heathens' are poor creatures who serve the devil and who lead a life full of cruelties and atrocities.⁸ However, Christian theology has not fully overcome its apologetic and dogmatic nature in principle and it is here that we have to attempt a breakthrough in order to develop an authentic theology for dialogue. Christianity's openness to dialogue, which implies the readiness to recognize the existence of salvific values outside its fold has yet to become a style of existence in which active relationship to those values would become essential to the wholeness of Christian existence itself. Here we lack a theology of dialogue, a theology which would explicitate the implications of the dialogical existence of religions. For, dialogue is not just a means to reach a stage where it would not be needed anymore but the manifestation of a new mode of existence which will be through and through dialogical.

i. Historical Relativity

Christian theology in the light of a world consciousness should recognize the historicity of Christianity. Christianity being a historical religion belongs to history and should not transgress the boundaries of history. This awareness would prevent theology from equating historical Christianity with transhistorical truth,⁹ and from absolutizing Christianity th-

coming hypotheses which destroy their previous assumptions, and welcoming them as a condition of advance; whereas the theologians... if they admitted that their assumptions had been upset, would consider it a major defeat for themselves" (L. Price, *Dialogue of Alfred North Whitehead*, as recorded by Lucian Price, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1954, p. 174).

8. Cf. Hans Plischke, *Von den Barbaren zu den Primitiven. Die Naturvölker durch die Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig, 1926), p. 54; cf. also Günter Lanczkowski, *Begegnung und Wandel der Religionen* (Güterslohdorf: Diederichs Verlag, 1971), p. 12.

9. Cf. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 55.

ough an exclusive claim to truth.¹⁰ When the exclusive claim to truth is given up, Christianity will look for what is positive and good in other religious traditions which are also part of history. As reality and its history are shot through by a basic unity, Christianity would get its fuller meaning only by relating itself and its history to other religions and their history. Evidently this is not to find itself anonymously in other religions nor to say that Christianity is the fulfilment of other religious traditions, but to make the relationship itself the essence of a new kind of existence which is dialogical. In other words, the traditional fulfilment-theology which asserted the fulfilment of all genuine religious values in Christianity should be redefined in such terms as to mean that Christianity will reach its fulfilment or perfection only in a dialogical relationship with other religions.

Thus, a theology that absolutizes Christianity cannot help any genuine dialogue. For when something is absolutized, it cuts itself off from the other realities and relations become secondary in importance. That is why such theological understanding of Christianity as proposed by Karl Rahner¹¹ with all its comprehensiveness and depth cannot be of real help to a theology of dialogue. A genuine theology for dialogue would avoid all claims to absoluteness,¹² because it is not the way how reality and knowledge ultimately are.

10. *Ibid.*

11. According to Rahner, "Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intendend for all men, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right" (K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, V, translated by Karl H. Kruger, Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966, p. 118); cf. also R. Panikkar and A. Koothottil, *art. cit.*, p. 12.

12. Hermann Hesse, the well known German literary writer, points to the fact that the claims to absoluteness is present in all the religions even in our times. This appears to him to be childish in comparison with the contemporary political awareness as well as scientific studies which have gone beyond such claims: "Im politischen Denken fortgeschrittener Leute ist Nationalismus etwas Gewesenes, Vergangenes, in den Religionen herrscht der Kinderglaube an die Alleingültigkeit

ii. Unity and Plurality in Religion

Hence a theology serving the cause of dialogue has to be aware of both the unity and plurality in religions. The fact of a basic unity in the religiosity underlying all religions is the real reason why there should be a dialogical relationship on the level of plurality. Neither unrelated plurality nor monolithic unity has to be the ideal before Christian theology but somewhat the middle position of pluralism. "Pluralism stands between unrelated plurality and a monolithic unity."¹³ Pluralism does not do away with the polar relationship between unity and plurality.

Here theology has to avoid the attitude not only of exclusivism which claims the possession of absolute truth for oneself, but also that of inclusivism which would hold that it can accept and include all the expressions of truth.¹⁴ Worse still is the attitude of parallelism which would assume "that all are different creeds which, in spite of meanderings and crossings, actually run parallel to meet only in the ultimate, in the *eschaton* at the very end of the human pilgrimage".¹⁵ All these are attitudes little helpful, even hostile to the cause of dialogue. In an existential confrontation with other faiths, Christianity has to become aware of its own relativity, which should be the starting point of a theology of dialogue. Relativity, however, does not mean an attitude of agnostic or indifferent relativism, but points to the way how things are, namely, "everything is wrapped up in an utter relativity of radical interdependence because every being is a function in the hierarchical order of beings and has its own place in the dynamism of history, a place not incidental to the thing but actually making the thing what it is".¹⁶

des eigenen Glaubens noch überall. Die Wissenschaft allerdings ist des Gemeinsamen in allen Glaubensformen der Welt längst inne geworden, die Religionsforschung kennt keine alleinseligmachende Religion mehr" (H. Hesse, *Mein Glaube*, Frankfurt: Bibliothek Suhrkamp, 1971, p. 125).

13. R. Panikkar, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, p. xxvii

14. *Ibid.*, p. xv, xvii.

15. *Ibid.*, xviii.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

iii. Cross-fertilization

Avoiding the attitudes of exclusivism and inclusivism, and the passive tolerance of each other, and realizing Christianity's historicity and relativity, theological thinking should consider seriously the possibility of a cross-fertilization between religions which eventually will integrate more than one religious tradition. After all, as Panikkar says, "most of mankind's great religious geniuses did not create or found new forms of religiousness out of nothing; rather they fused more than one religious stream, moulding them with their own prophetic gifts".¹⁷ Thus, Jesus Christ and his gospel cannot be understood in isolation from the religious traditions in which he was born and brought up. The same should be said with regard to Buddha and the other religious geniuses of history. What made them really significant personalities of religious history is that in them the cross fertilization of religious perceptions took place in incomparable and unique ways. However, without stopping with them, the process has to go on. In a way Christ and Buddha should go on existing across the frontiers of the past and the borders of culture. Thus today, in this age of dialogue, Christian theology has to come to the realization that

only by cross-fertilization and mutual fecundation may the present state of affairs be overcome; only by stepping over present cultural and philosophical boundaries can Christian life again become creative and dynamic.... This applies to other religions as well.¹⁸

As the times of isolated existence are gone by, it is important for the religious life of contemporary man that the religions encounter each other and grow mutually. Otherwise, the traditional religions will remain "altogether obsolete, irrelevant relics of the past, and what is worse, modern Man will be uprooted and impoverished".¹⁹ It is becoming increasingly clear, then, that one needs to link up different kinds of religion. But one may not know how to do it. It is the task of theology today to work along these lines and foster the meeting of religions.

17. *Ibid.* p. 98. 18. *Ibid.*, p. 61. 19. *Ibid.*

iv. Intra-religious dialogue

Religious dialogue paving the way for a dialogical mode of existence in the realm of religions implies much more than a get together of, and exchange of ideas by the representatives of various religions. Such meetings are certainly useful, but those dialogues often stop with the exposition of each one's religious position. Here dialogue becomes parallel talk and does not reach down to the level of being and therefore would not lead to the growth and enrichment of religious consciousness. What is needed is a cross-fertilization.

The cross fertilization has to take place within oneself, not as an experimentation but as "a genuine experience undergone within one's own faith".²⁰ Hence, a theology for dialogue has to begin from within when religious faiths meet head on inside one self prompting "genuine religious pondering, and even a religious crisis, at the bottom of Man's heart; when interpersonal dialogue turns into intra-personal soliloquy."²¹

v. The category of growth

The cross-fertilization of religions and the intra-religious dialogue point to the possibility of growth in religions. In the words of Panikkar, "the one category able to carry the main burden in the religious encounter and in the further development of religion (religions) is *growth*".²² It is then important that Christian theology integrates into it the category of growth. Theology and religion are not directed mainly to the past and are not simply matters of archaeological interest.²³ It has to become constantly clear to Christian theology that "in the life of religion as in the life of a person, where there is no growth, there is decay; to stop is stagnation and death."²⁴ The category of growth is not just the characteristic of the phenomenal world only. There should be the possibility of real growth even in God "at least in-as-much as neither immutability nor change are categories of the divine."²⁵

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20. *Ibid.*, p. 12. 21. *Ibid.*, p. 10. 22. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
 23. *Ibid.*; cf. also *Ibid.*, p. 20.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
 25. *Ibid.*

Hence a theology for the age of dialogue should free itself from the immutable essences and non-revisable dogmas and one-and-for-all closed revelations, and should rely on a God who is the future of history, who is constant newness and pure act as the Scholastics said.²⁶ Similarly, Christ, liberated from the boundedness of time and space through his death has entered in the process of growth with history. The resurrection of Jesus in fact proclaims that he will be present with history not as a past memory but as an actuality. If so Christians should put their faith not in a Christ of the past, but in a Christ who, refusing to be the prisoner of the past has risen to walk before us into the Galilee of the future. Christ is thus no more the monopoly of the Christians, but the possession of the whole of mankind. This is equally true with regard to his gospel, and to the whole of Bible. The Bible is not like a fossil to be preserved as such for ever, but has to become the inheritance of the growing history. We find cross-fertilization of religious perceptions and experiences in the Bible. The same should go on taking place throughout history. In other words, the Bible too should be in a constant process of growth and become the possession of all. This is true also with regard to other religious personalities and scriptures.

vi. Risk

In the age of apologetics, theology was over-defensive and its concern was the protection of Christian faith. That is how dogmas came into existence to which theology was subjected and belief demanded as if truth needed the protection of our theologies and beliefs. To be useful for dialogue theology has to be freed from this forced allegiance, and faith has to become more enlightened. For, true dialogue leading to the dialogical mode of existence would certainly involve a risk in one's religious faith and allegiance. This risk, however, belongs to the very dynamics of a living faith in the dialogical context inasmuch as dialogical mode of existence "discloses another religious world in one's neighbour that we can neither ignore nor brush aside, but must try to take up, integrate into our own."²⁷ This risk which can stake everything a Christian is

26. Cf. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

and believes, because of the possibility of a conversion which it implies, a conversion 'so thorough-going that the convictions and beliefs he had hitherto held may vanish or undergo a far-reaching change.'²⁸ This is in fact part of the dynamics of a growing faith, and one has to be open to it.

Conclusion

We spoke of religious dialogue in terms of a new mode of interrelated existence in the world of religions. In this sense dialogue becomes a style of religious reality in which more than one religious tradition enter into the process of constant cross fertilization, first within the heart and mind of the individual and then in a community of people and finally within the whole of mankind. Reflection upon the experience of this intra-religious dialogue is the starting point for a theology of religious dialogue. That theology should rely more on such philosophical categories as unity, polarity, communion, relationship than on individuality, multiplicity, substance and the like. Here Indian philosophy and religious experience has more significance than many trends of Western philosophy which formed the basis and frame-work of the traditional Christian theology. Making use of the Indian *Weltanschauung* for the task of theological thinking is not for the limited scope of creating a theology for India, but for updating the whole of Christian theology for our times.

To be able to promote dialogue Christian theology in a way has to undergo some basic category conversions. This means also a critical overcoming of some of the presuppositions of the traditional Christian theology. The restricted understanding of God's revelation, and his plans, the dogmatic approach to truth, the over emphasis on the faith-dimension of religion, and the *a priori* character of many of its basic principles can be mentioned as some of the points where Christian theology needs to undertake a revision on the basis of the emerging world consciousness which is characteristic of our times. Then theology will begin to realize that what counts ultimately is not this or that religion in isolation, but what they can be in their togetherness and mutual cross fertilization as part of the total history of mankind.

Little Flower Seminary
 Always

Abraham Koothottil

28. *Ibid.*

Mircea Eliade and Yoga Spirituality

A strange fact of interreligious dialogue in our present age is that it did not start with religion. It began with linguists like Max Muller, Burrow and Silburn who were attracted by the affinity of ancient languages like Latin, Greek and Sanskrit, and discovered the wealth of religious experience in religious texts. This pursuit was taken up by humanists who took an academic interest in religions as expressions of the human spirit. One of the leading thinkers of this century who started with a humanistic interest and discovered the unifying and transforming spirit of religions is Mircea Eliade. For him yoga was the starting point in his comparative study of religions. Yoga has been described as Mankind's oldest known yet still continuing spirituality. Rooted in the ancient sources of India, Yoga disciplines (*saddhāna*) are today practiced not only in Asia but throughout most of Europe and America as well. Yoga spirituality, when fully understood, proclaims a "universal path" which promises to transcend all cultural and religious barriers.

It was thus no accident that brought the young Mircea Eliade, fresh from a study of the Renaissance quest for universal philosophical answers, to Calcutta in 1928; his next several years would be devoted to Sanskrit language and a thorough study of the ancient Yoga tradition. "The Renaissance man's longing for a 'primordial revelation' was... appropriated by Eliade to mean a humanist longing to break the parochial limits of religion."¹

In a certain sense, I could even say that for the young man that I was, Orientalism was only a new version of the Renaissance, the discovery of new

1. Guilford Dudley III, *Religion On Trial: Mircea Eliade and His Critics* (Philadelphia:: Temple University Press, 1977), p. 44.

sources and the return to forgotten, abandoned sources. Perhaps, without knowing it, I was in search of a new wider humanism, bolder than the humanism of the Renaissance, which was too dependent on the models of Mediterranean classicism. Perhaps, too, without realizing it clearly, I had understood the true lesson of the Renaissance: the broadening of the cultural horizon and the reconsideration of man's situation in a wider perspective. What, at first glance, is further from the Florence of Marsilio Ficino than Calcutta, Benares, or Rishikesh? Nevertheless, I found myself there because, as was the case with the humanists of the Renaissance, a provincial image of man didn't satisfy me, and because ultimately, I dreamed of rediscovering the model of a universal man."²

Eliade's heart, stimulated by the openness and the "nuova scienza" of Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno, turned naturally to India, the Yoga tradition, and Patanjali in quest of universal answers. Dissatisfaction with narrow Western parochialism coupled with a passion to uncover the deepest meaning of religious phenomena brought the young Eliade to Professor Surendranath Dasgupta in Calcutta. The complex and intriguing Yoga tradition would form the subject of his serious study; his dissertation would be an attempt to explain Yoga spirituality. His authorship of three excellent books on Yoga, especially the classic *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, testify to the lasting impact which the Yoga tradition had on Mircea Eliade. From yoga Eliade learned answers to apply to the most diverse expressions of religious phenomena. To study Yoga then is, in a sense, to retrace the formative footsteps of Eliade. Mircea Eliade's interpretative vision, his world-view, and his understanding of spiritual process all demand an appreciation of the basic ontology, cosmology, mythology, and the liberating salvific process of the Yogi.

The humanist desire to break sectarian bonds found a living model in India. Common to many different expressions of Hinduism, Brahmanism, and even Buddhism, Yoga discipli-

2. Mircea Eliade, *No Souvenirs: Journal, 1957-1969* (New York: Harphar & Row, 1977), p. 17.

nes and techniques were also essential to Tantrism. Moreover, Eliade soon discovered Yogic asceticism mixed with various indigenous alchemical and aboriginal practices. Later studies would also uncover complex forms of Taoist Yoga in China. Not even Eliade's Christian foundations would prove antagonistic to Yogic meditational practices. No spirituality, when probed deeply, seemed inimical to Yoga.

As Mircea Eliade deepened his study of the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and Mahabhārata, he found many different forms and formulations of the Yoga tradition. One scholar estimates that prior to the classic aphorisms of Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, there may have been as many as thirty-nine different schools of Yoga in India alone. India's traditional acceptance and broad tolerance of contradictory but complementary cosmogonic myths fascinated and impressed Eliade deeply. Eliade's classic theory on the precise function of myths, his celebrated theory of archetypes, as well as his explanation of the salvific liberation of Existential Man all owe much to these classic Indian sources. Like a wise guru (*satgūru*), Mircea Eliade expanded and applied the lessons of Yogic healing to suffering Man regardless of the cultural context in which he found him vested.

Yet these Yogic healing techniques could not be mastered without knowledge of Sāṃkhyan theory. So interconnected is this theory that India always prefers to speak in terms of the *Sāṃkhya-Yoga darśana* (system) when describing Yoga. Samkhyan theory offers an explanation, a cosmology, an ontology and even a metaphysics which underlies the strategies of Yogic spiritual process. Samkhyan theory thus added necessary dimension and depth to the lessons Eliade learned from Yoga.

The lessons of yoga

As Mircea Eliade concentrated on the teachings of the Yogis and the Samkhya-Yoga texts, he discovered an exacting and concise analysis of man; he found an almost scientific attempt to analyse the "suffering" (*dhukha*) of Man and to prescribe an exact healing answer.

In contrast to the familiar but frustrating linear interpretations of history, he found a cyclical world-view in India. According to this perspective, all "matter" both unfolds and yet refolds in a cycle designed to awaken man to the deepest meaning of consciousness." Two foundational elements underlie and explain the universe: "matter" (*prakṛti*) and "spirit" or "consciousness" (*puruṣa*). Yet "matter" in all of its forms and vestures "is for the sake of 'spirit'" (SK LVII: *purusavimokṣa-nimittam*). The complete and total dedication of "matter" to "spirit" is critical to a Sāṃkhya-Yoga interpretation. All "matter" evolves and unfolds as a "tool" or "instrument" designed to awaken "consciousness" or "spirit". When this "consciousness" is fully awakened, all forms of "matter" recede or vanish from the spotlight of attention. Accordingly, linear human history, the story of Man, yields in significance to the paramount importance of this transphenomenal awakening experience, to man's realization of the deepest meaning of "consciousness". Eliade's *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* echoes, explores, and expands this *ahistorical* thrust found in the Yoga tradition. *Homo religiosus* seeks to "escape the meaninglessness of history by returning to a mythic archetypal time".³

Part of Eliade's attraction to Yoga was the candid realism of its starting-point. All existence as experienced is judged painful. Man, as observed by the Yogi, suffers from a massive sense of misidentification. The *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā* begins by describing Existential Man as suffering from a threefold pain of misidentification (SK I: *duḥkhatrāya*). Yet, as Eliade writes, Yoga also "offers the possibility of a concrete and final way of escape from the unbroken succession of sufferings."⁴

Moreover, "all India has accorded to sufferings, whatever their nature (cosmic, psychological, or historical), a clearly defined meaning and function."⁵ For the Yogi, suffering has a very definite function; it awakens man to the frustration and

3. Dudley, *Religion on Trial*, p. 18.

4. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), p. 99.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

inadequacy of human existence. Metaphysical suffering leads to a search for a deeper and more satisfying answer: it draws man from phenomenal frustration (history) to transphenomenal healing (ahistory). Moreover; the Sāmkhya Yogins proclaim this "transphenomenal dimension" as already present although concealed within the mystery of frustrating phenomenal existence. "One rejects this world and depreciates this life because one knows that there exists something else, beyond growth, beyond temporality, beyond suffering. India rejects the cosmos and profane life because she thirsts for a sacred world and way of life."⁶ All man need do, according to the Yogis, is awaken to this hidden salvific wisdom (*vivaktāvyakta jñanī*) which already embraces him. Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane* explores this omnipresent tension between the "transphenomenal" and the "phenomenal"; here he studies how various primitive cultures have sensed and appreciated "transphenomenality" even in the midst of everyday phenomena. "Sacred words and things always point beyond themselves to what Eliade calls 'a meta-empirical reality and purpose'... The participants in these sacred worlds both insist upon understanding their frames of reference and their centers of gravity as rooted in a transcendental reality: the Sacred, the Holy, the Religious."⁷ Man, although observed to be in pain and suffering, is not a meaningless data of phenomenality. Man's quest is to uncover and discover transcendence from the numerous transphenomenal clues found in human experience. Suffering stimulates this quest. Several of Eliade's cultural studies illustrate and explore how suffering initiates and deepens man's thirst for transcendence.

Yoga diagnoses Man as suffering from a serious problem of misidentification. Man first awakens to an "identity" linked to frustrating, ever-changing matter; this, according to the Sāmkhya-Yogin, is an underestimation of whom man really is. And yet, paradoxically, this is the human condition; this is

6. Mircea Eliade, Trans. Charles Markmann, *patanjali and Yoga* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975) p. 18.

7. Wendel C. Beane and William G. Doty (eds), *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1973), Vol. I, p. xxv.

the real state of Existential Man. Like a child awakening, man grasps and clings to that sense of "identity" which he first touches. Man awakening to "consciousness" naturally identifies himself with that particular body, mind, Ego, and psyche which surround him. Yet the Sāmkhya-Yoga tradition charges that a man who posits total meaning and complete identity in such forms of "matter" radically underestimates and denigrates himself and his deepest nature.

Yoga diagnosis further specifies that man suffers from an Ego problem. In the initial moment of human awareness, man links his sense of "I" to those particular strands of matter which surround him. The Yoga texts describe this as the "moment of *ahamkāra*", the "moment of the Ego". Although this expression of *ahamkāra*, this manifestation of the Ego is necessary and essential for man to awaken to the human condition, it is also the "moment" which defines and specifies the suffering and frustration of phenomenal man. It is the "moment" when man chooses to limit his sense of "I-ness" to particular strands of matter; this very linkage obscures man's deepest essence "Consciousness" or "spirit" is now limited by those particular strands of matter which envelop each man. The Ego becomes like a filter which limits, interprets, and obfuscates perfect "consciousness". From this frustrating partial Ego-identity, Yoga proposes to lead man to a deeper and more per-during sense of total "identification".

When Mircea Eliade focuses on Man, he too finds Man to be suffering from a problem of misidentification. "Ego-assertion" may well be the source of Man's confusing misidentification; it may, in fact, be the prison of human existence. Like the Yogis, Eliade also sought answers within the depths of "consciousness". The phenomenal Ego appears a barrier to be by passed and transcended. A psycho-spiritual journey into the depths of "consciousness" is recommended by Eliade as well as the Yoga tradition.

A journey to "Transconsciousness"

The Yoga tradition details four major "moments in the

psychospiritual journey to *samadhi*.⁸ Significantly the Yoga texts first speak of stilling all movements of matter; the unfolding strands of evolution must first be perfectly stilled by discipline. Then the Sāmkhyā texts describe an exact refolding of matter. Unfolding evolution is *reversed* by a process best described as involution. This radical reversal of evolution, this movement back to an “*in illo tempore*” period parallels Eliade’s understanding of spiritual process. The frustrating terror of linear history may, perhaps, be overcome by a return to salvific ahistorical beginnings, by a rediscovery of the efficacy of the primordial mythical archetype.

Four “moments” of awakening are described by the Yoga tradition. *Ahaṁkāra* is the initial moment of human awareness; man awakens to a sense of identity which the Ego links to those observable strands of matter which surround him. Through Yogic meditational practices, this initial sense of identity yields to the moment of the “subtle body” (*suṅśma-śarīra*); identity is invested in the more subtle matter of the psyche, a thirteen dimensional instrument according to the Sāmkhyā-Yogin. Yet even this meta-empirical identity yields to the transitional moment of *buddhi*, a pregnant moment of profound spiritual wisdom which immediately precedes total liberation from all forms of matter. *Buddhi* seems most aptly described as a moment of ‘cosmic consciousness’, not unlike the cosmic consciousness observed by Teilhard de Chardin. Finally authentic identification is realized when man completely abandons matter in all of its forms and opens to a perfect understanding of ‘consciousness’ or ‘spirit’ (*puruṣa in kaivalya*). The Yoga tradition calls this ultimate goal *Samadhi*.

Mircea Eliade became intrigued by this mammoth Yogic effort to reverse evolution and to escape the terror of history. The very goal of the history of religions, he argued, is “to identify the presence of the transcendent in human consciousness: to isolate – in the enormous mass of the ‘unconscious-

8. Frank Podgorski, “Sāmkhyā-Yoga Meditation: Psycho-Spiritual Transvaluation”, *Journal of Dharma* II, 2 (April, 1977). 152-163.

ness' – that which is transconscious"⁹ The Yogis set out to defocus on matter and refocus or concentrate on "consciousness" or "spirit" (*puruṣa*), on whatever is other than matter. This Yogic quest spurred Eliade's search for what he called "transconsciousness". Eliade's theories of myth, symbol, and archetypes clearly presume an interplay between the conscious, the "transconscious", and the unconscious.

"Transconsciousness" became Eliade's description of transcendence. He first uses this term to describe the Yogi's ultimate state of liberation from the cosmos and the profane life which surrounds him. Having awakened to the deepest meaning of "spirit" or "consciousness" (*puruṣa*), the liberated Yogi is totally free from and completely impervious to his surrounding environment. The Sāṃkhya-Yoga texts view this as similar to a return to "beginnings", to a primordial state in which all forms of potential matter are so perfectly balanced that no manifest expression takes place. Since all matter is in a state of perfect balance or equilibrium, "spirit" or "consciousness" (*puruṣa*) is able to be completely liberated and freed from all forms of matter. Reflecting on this absolute and total freedom of the liberated Yogi, Eliade writes:

India was obsessed by freedom, absolute autonomy ... Hindu spirituality has the merit of introducing freedom into the cosmos. A *jīvanmukti's* mode of being is not given in the cosmos; very much to the contrary, in a universe dominated by laws, absolute freedom is unthinkable. India has the merit of having added a new dimension to the universe: that of existing as a free being.¹⁰

So absolute, so complete is this freedom, that the liberated Yogi is described as completely transcending man's customary bonds of time, space, and history.

This absolute freedom, this Yogic explanation of "salvation" is so radical that it seems equivalent to forcing another

9. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, p. 83.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

mode of being¹¹ which completely transcends the human condition. Sāṃkhya-Yoga "salvation" is a totally freeing liberation following man's disciplined inner spiritual journey; is an "ecstasis" following an "enstasis"; it is that release into the absolute realms of "perfect consciousness" which follows the Yogi's austere journey of interiorization. So striking a contrast does there seem between phenomenal man and this experience of pure *puruṣa* that Mircea Eliade calls this a "difference of an ontological order; they belong to two different modes of being."¹² To speak, then, of "man" and to equate him with the liberated *puruṣa* seems almost a semantic confusion of words. That which had once been man has now been radically dehumanized, deconditioned, de-Egoized, and disengaged; "man" now realizes his deepest mode of existence, perfect "spirit" or "consciousness".

Yet, for Eliade, this final goal does not mean a descent or escape into a trance - like a state or a paradise of dreams. *Samadhi* is a "positive attainment of 'transconsciousness', not a negative regression to the 'deep sleep' of prenatal existence. Apprehension of this unity entails genuine transcendence, not a descent to a former level of natural consciousness."¹³ This of course, is perfectly consistent with the teachings of Patanjali and the Yogis. The Yogis claim to have uncovered a real and viable answer to the dilemma of Man. Furthermore, as Eliade also remarks, this liberating experience entails a direct intuition into the deepest meaning of Being. The Yogis apprehend a primordial unity; the clash of all opposites is transcended by their liberating wisdom.

The Yogi transcends opposites and, in a unique experience, unites emptiness and superabundance, life and death, Being and nonbeing... There is a "return to the beginning", but with the difference that the man "liberated in this life" recovers the

11. Beame, *Myths, Rites, Symbols*, Vol. II, p. 312.

12. Mircea Eliade, Trans. Willard Trask, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), Bollinger Series LVI, p. 15.

13. Dudley, *Religion on Trial*, pp. 107-08.

original situation enriched by the dimensions of freedom and transconsciousness... He reintegrates the original completeness after having established a new and paradoxical mode of being consciousness of freedom, which exists nowhere in the cosmos.¹⁴

Because of this positive realization, because of this attainment of perfect "transconsciousness", the liberated Yogi claims to achieve genuine *jñāna*, that wisdom which both liberates and yet simultaneously offers authentic insights into the mystery of Being. The salvific return of the Yogi to "primordial beginnings" integrates all dualities, all opposites, all frustrations experienced within the phenomenal world. "Transconsciousness" both transcends and yet integrates phenomenal experience. That spark of "intelligence" first perceived by man's Ego is now fully appreciated and perfectly understood. Thus, for both Mircea Eliade and Yoga, the return to "beginnings" is salutary and enlightening. To attain "transconsciousness" is to realize and appreciate liberating transcendence.

Eliade's Interreligious Search

For Eliade the Yoga and the Indian experience was only the beginning of a wider study of religions. Through the study of Yoga he realized the need to protest against the Existential linked to the terror of human history and to go even beyond renaissance humanism in search of what he called "transconsciousness". But as he himself states: "It took me ten years to realize that the Indian experience alone could not reveal to me the universal man I had searched for since adolescence."¹⁶ His search had to be broadened.

Accordingly, the scope and breadth of Eliade's data expanded radically. From Siberia to Africa, from primitives to Zen, from medicine men and shamans to contemporary philosophers, Eliade continued to explore and expand his study of *homo religiosus*. He still seemed very much a "Renaissance man" in quest of universals; only the breadth of his data had

14. Eliade, *Yoga*, pp. 98-100.

15. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, p. 17.

16. *Ibid.*

expanded. Yet almost unwittingly, academic studies had created two limiting orientations within Eliade. While the Platonism of Italian Renaissance influenced his initial philosophical leanings, the ahistorical thrust of the Yoga tradition dominated even more clearly his subsequent work. Professor Dudley writes:

It could be argued that Eliade is so dependent on Indian material... that Patanjali's theories of Yoga are to him as normative as the Platonic doctrine of forms for determining *homo religiosus*.¹⁷

These two thought-systems of his formal academic studies, the Platonism of the Italian Renaissance and the Yoga of Patanjali, became the twin filters through which Mircea Eliade studied *homo religiosus*. All of Eliade's theories and hypotheses depend heavily on these two foundations. Since both Neo-Platonism and Yoga are strong and useful system of thought, Eliade's broad applications produced many helpful and beneficial insights. Our knowledge of the meaning of myths, symbols, rites, and archetypes has benefitted precisely because of Eliade's orientations. Because Mircea Eliade studied Yoga, our understanding of transcendence has expanded. Yet as Professor Dudley also points out, we must always remember "Eliade's interpretation of religious phenomena is both informed and limited by his understanding of Indian religions, particularly Yoga."¹⁸

Clearly, Eliade was deeply influenced by his Yoga studies. The seeds and germs of some of his most creative thinking may be traced to the texts of Patanjali and Īśvarakṛṣṇa. Eliade viewed Yoga as a spiritual process with the possibility of universal applicability. Yoga's expansion beyond the territorial borders of India and Asia suggests the viability of this view. For Eliade, "transcendentalism" unifies, integrates, and explains all dualities, all suffering, and all pain (*duhkha*). From Yoga, Eliade learned sensitivity to the healing power of this "transcendentalism" regardless of the cultural vesture in which he found *homo religiosus*.

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17. Dudley, *Religion on Trial*, p. 105.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Past Twenty-five Years

(A Survey of Indian Christian Literature)¹

One great concern which emerged from Vatican Council II was dialogue at various levels. Dialogue with believers of all religions is one of them. The basic principles of this dialogue were enunciated in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*)². Perhaps a deeper theological principle is found in the Decree on Evangelization. It reads: "The seed which is the Word of God sprouts from the ground watered by divine dew. From this ground the seed draws nourishing elements which it transforms and assimilates into itself. Finally it bears much fruit. Thus, in imitation of the plan of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the apostles take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations... From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace... If this goal is to be achieved theological investigation must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area..." (*Ad Gentes* 22)³

It is, however, painfully realized by theologians and historians of Christianity that only a limited number of cultures have, so far, substantially absorbed and assimilated Christian revelation and that too in the remote past, namely the Jewish-Semitic, the Greco-Roman and the Byzantine. They show how revelation and culture can combine to form a vital and harmonious synthesis in which an existing religion adopts new ritual forms, doctrinal emphases, and suitable modes of organization.

1. The present article is mainly concerned with Christian initiatives in literature with regard to Hinduism (also Buddhism and Jainism) rather than Hindu initiatives such initiatives on the part of Hindus are rare (perhaps one of the exceptions may be that of Subba Rao, see Kaj Baago's book on him: *The Movement around Subba Rao*, Madras: 1968).

2. W. M. Abbot (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*, New York: 1966, p. 660ff.

3. *Ibid*, p. 612.

Contemporary Indian Christian Literature

It is certain that the number of Christians in India who voice their sincere interest in a dialogue with Indian culture and religions, particularly with Hinduism, both classical and its modern interpretations, is steadily increasing; and their voice is being given greater hearing. Since Independence Indian Christian literature dealing with inter-faith questions and concerns has started accumulating.

Hindu Scriptures began to be made more and more easily available to Christian students of Hinduism. Past Christian literature on Hinduism was published or republished at individual and collective initiatives. New studies, critical and otherwise, on Hindu scriptures and various aspects of Hinduism were taken up with greater zest. Reviews, studies, critical evaluation of Christian approaches to Hinduism in the past and recent past have come out with an increasing tempo. Books and articles published after Independence, especially in the 1960s and 70s, appear to break new grounds. Already a good deal of literature has been devoted to a stock-taking of the contemporary literature.

As in the past it was the Protestants who took the initiative in launching the contemporary movement. The *Indian Journal of Theology* was started by them in 1952 and during the last 25 years it has published a number of articles and reviews relevant to the present topic. The 'Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society' with its organ *Religion and Society* established in Bangalore by Paul Devanandan was very significant considering the number of articles which have been published in *Religion and Society* and the number of books and book-lets in several series such as *Indian Christian Thought*, and *Inter-faith Dialogue*, *Pamphlets on Religion*, *Confessing the Faith in India*.

A movement which helped Indian Christian literature in our times was the Ashram movement. Perhaps the Christian Ashram movement in India owes its origin to Protestant initiative but in course of time Catholics have associated with it in a big way. Protestants like S. Jesudason, E. Forrester-Paton, P. Chenchiah, Murray Rogers, and Catholics like Monchanin (Parama Arupya Anand), Le Saux (Abhishiktananda), Bede Griffiths, Francis Acharya have contributed to the move a lot and written a good deal on Hindu-Christian meeting. Two Catholics, Dr. J. A. Cuttat and Swami Abhishiktananda founded in the sixties a colloquium group which came to be called the 'Circle' consisting of a select number of Catholics and Protestants. Their meeting and discussions have given rise to

another series of literature. Although both the movements were started previous to Vatican II, it was during and after Vatican II much of the literature was published.⁴

The Council, especially its documents on evangelization and non-Christian religions, has given a great impetus to Catholics to take their place fully in the on going discussion on Hindu Christian meeting, though even before that views were being expounded by some Catholics. *The Clergy Monthly*, a monthly review run by the Jesuits in India for the benefit of the Indian clergy, had started publishing articles relevant to the present subject. In 1960s the number of such features increased and the review has now assumed an Indian name: *Vidyajyoti*. It is a source of reports, reviews and articles on inter-faith approaches, *Jeevadhara* started in 1971, one of whose issues is exclusively devoted to the subject, has many articles which are very relevant. Dharmaram College with its Centre for the Study of World Religions has shown, during the past many years, keen interest in the subject. Besides publishing individual contributions by its professors in the form of articles and books it has conducted seminars, many of the papers of which have been published. Recently Dharmaram has launched the *Journal of Dharma*, fully devoted to inter-faith studies.

The foregoing is a survey, not very complete, of the literary activity that is being carried on by Christians in India on inter-religious subjects. In this connection mention must also be made of the many seminars, consultations and conferences that have recently become a general feature in India both among Protestants and Catholics. Papers and reports of these meetings are usually published in books and periodicals and contain very useful material on the subject. The official documents of the churches and their various organs are also worth mentioning here, e. g., CSI, CNI, NCCI and the like (Protestant); CBCI and the like (Catholic).⁵

4. About the activities of this circle a general idea may be gathered from the article of Murray Rogers, "Hindu and Christian - A Moment Breaks", *Religion and Society*, 12 (1965), pp. 35-44 and also in Herbert Jai Singh (ed.), *Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Bangalore: 1967, pp. 104-17.

5. Protestant documents: e. g. Synods of CSI 1958, 1964, 1966, 1970, 1972, etc; The United Church of Northern India Survey etc.

Catholic documents: e. g., The Reports of the CBCI Meetings.

Past Trends in Christian Inter-faith Approaches

It was perhaps Robert de Nobili who first took the initiative seriously for a positive encounter with Hinduism. His achievement is to be seen in his understanding and adaptation of Hindu customs and practices, in his pioneering study of Sanskrit and Tamil and in his initiation of the essential task of evolving a Christian theological vocabulary for Indian languages. Some of De Nobili's successors, especially Constant Beschi, tried to carry the work forward. Though these pioneers made strenuous efforts to understand Hinduism intimately, and though their examples have inspired all positive approaches in this regard up to the present, their approach was mainly to refute Hindu tenets rather than adapt and assimilate them. The approach of other missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant (they even questioned the validity of De Nobili's methods) who worked in India from the 16th to the 20th century was much more conservative and apologetic. Their general attitude was one of polemics, based on a onesided appreciation of one's own religion and culture while remaining ignorant of others. The comments made by Kosuke Koyama in his recent book, *No Handles on the Cross*, is pertinent here. He says: "We have had enough of the divine beauty contest... Up to now the discussion of the finality of Christ has been predominantly formulated within the framework of Joseph's sweet dream of my sheaf-stood-up theology. All religions are supposed to bow down to the upright sheaf of Christianity."⁶

This was one of the three main approaches that were prevalent till the turn of the 20th century. A second approach which became dominant since the 18th century was the descriptive or neutral attitude of the handful of learned Orientalists who translated the scriptures and laid the basic foundations for a human understanding of the Hindu and Buddhist faiths. Murray Rogers says: "...more often than not, they approached these faiths from the outside; they were concerned with 'facts' with a technical and objective understanding of the faith as phenomena to be examined, described, and understood intellectually. ... it failed to recognise the intrinsic inwardness of a religion as spirituality, as the movement of the soul towards the Holy." A third approach has been that of the syncretists whose attitude veered towards the other extreme compared to the missionary exclusiveness and polemics. Started in the last century it attempted to assess the various religions by a common measuring rod, to understand the religious phenomena

6. See a review of his book in *Clergy Review*, 62 (1977), p. 205.

as springing from a common denominator, a common irreducible base, so that men might achieve universality for which they long. All these three attitudes are generally considered to be defective; but they contain positive aspects which may be further transformed with the new spirit of today.

By the end of the last century attitudes started changing. Indian converts like Goreh and Upādhyāya possessing a real knowledge of Hinduism from within gradually appeared on the scene. Some missionaries like Slater and Farquhar, influenced by the theory of evolution, saw in Hinduism a stage in man's religious development. The Orientalists, of whom Max Muller was a pioneer, suggested a more sympathetic attitude. This sympathetic approach gained ground during the first two or three decades of this century through the literary efforts of both Indians like A. J. Appasamy, Sadhu Sundar Singh, and missionaries like J. N. Farquhar, P. Johanns, G. Dandoy, MacNicol.

But then there was a setback. Under the influence of neo-orthodoxy of the West, some missionaries reacted sharply to the new approach in which they saw the danger of syncretism. Hendrick Kraemer, greatly influenced as he was by Karl Barth's distinction of 'religion' and 'revelation', argued that 'the whole world of attitudes and decisions and modes of being implied in the biblical revelation, is a type wholly *sui generis*, distant from religious thinking in the usual understanding of the word and equally distant from philosophical thinking'.

The Tambaram Conference (1939) was deeply influenced by Kraemer's doctrine of 'discontinuity.' The effect of Tambaram on the Indian scene was to create a reaction to the liberalism of the inter-war period. Chenchiah and S. K. George and C. F. Andrews continued to advocate inter-religious fellowship, but their's was a minority voice. It was not until the 1950s, with the rise of a new generation of Indian Christian thinkers, that the question was taken up in a new way. In the last twenty years, the whole issue has been widely discussed and the 'theology of dialogue' has come to the fore.

New Trends in general

In the contemporary Indian Christian literature which I have surveyed in earlier section of this article, one can notice various currents and undercurrents, different trends and approaches to non-Christian religions, from the most conservative to the most progressive. I do not think that it is time yet to classify these trends and approaches neatly; any attempt to do that can only be tentative and provisional. With this precaution one may pick up three major approaches – spiritual-con-

templative, intellectual-theological and social - that easily catch the eye in the contemporary literary scene. Again, when this is done there cannot be any claim that these are the only trends or that they are mutually exclusive.

The Spiritual-Contemplative Approach

On December 2, 1964, in Bombay, Pope Paul VI was given a tumultuous welcome by the people of the city and by thousands of others who had travelled from all over India. The vast majority of the cheering crowds were Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Secularists. Recalling this event Rev. Murray Rogers of Jyotiniketan, the Christian Ashram of Kareili, asks: "Why did it happen?" He finds a clue to the answer in the words with which Pope Paul addressed a group of non-Christians later that week: "Yours ... is the home of a nation that has sought God with a relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and hymns of fervent prayer."

M. Rogers reflects: "We may be involved as a nation in a vast technological revolution, (and not a moment too early) we may be turning to materialism with a speed unexpected in the so-called 'spiritual East', but something down in the depths, the unconscious depths, of millions of Indian people kindled at the coming of a great spiritual leader." Shall we, as Christians, touch that something and realize it as our own?

The founders and pioneers of Ashrams like the Saccidananda in South India and Jyotiniketan in the North - people like Fr. Monchanin, Dom Le Saux, Dom Bede Griffiths, Rev. Murray Rogers - have been for some time engaged in a spiritual contemplative dialogue with Hinduism.

Fr. Monchanin (Parama Arupya-Anand)⁷, and Swami Abhishiktananda were the co-founders of the *Saccidananda Ashram* on the banks of the river Kaveri in South India. The purpose of founding this Ashram was the adoration and contemplation of God, one in Three, the *Saccidananda*, i. e., in the Indian spiritual context. Abishiktananda was a founder-member of the 'Circle' too. He moved between the *Saccidananda Ashram* in the South and his hermitage at Gyansu beside the Ganges in the Himalayas in constant search of a profound Christian spiritual experience of religious Hinduism and reached great heights in the contemplation of *Saccidananda*. Writing about the experiences of the meeting of the 'Circle' in his book, *Hindu Christian meeting Point* he says: "The time has come for the Church - indeed for all churches together to enter into

7. On Monchanin see *ibid.*, p. 144ff.

official contact with these religions . . . this should be so particularly so that in humility and charity they come to recognize their neighbour's awareness of the presence of God. The Christian who enters into dialogue needs a 'Knowledge' of those ultimate depths of the self, where the mystery revealed itself to the attentive soul of the Rishis."

Dom Bede Griffiths, who is also associated with the *Saccidanand Ashram*, has similar views.⁸ He insists that the real point of meeting must be in mystical experience. Hinduism seeks to know God, to experience the reality of God in the depths of the soul. It is at this level that Hindus and Christians have to meet so that they can find out what they have in common and where the real difference lies. 'It is in this union with God - behind images and concepts - in the ground of the soul that the true meeting must take place.' There are a number of others who fully or partially accept these views, e. g., Professor S. Jesudasan, R. C. Das, Prof. Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai, Mark Sunder Rao. Here I will give two illustrations of this spiritual contemplative approach, one described by Rev. Murray Rogers and the other from Swami Abhishiktananda.

Rev. Murray Rogers considers dialogue as a readiness to listen to the other *as other*.⁹ "We may not listen in order to prepare our methods of approach, proclamation or attack, but with the awareness that Christ speaks to us from the other. Far from expecting to despise or belittle what hear we will be set to appreciate." To listen means far more than simply to stop talking; it demands a silence in oneself in order to understand the non Christian brother as he understands himself, a 'putting into brackets' of my own Christian convictions. The moment will come in real dialogue when the Christian will speak not a prefabricated answer but a word to a partner who has been understood.

There is need of both an inner dialogue and an external dialogue, but the former is an essential prerequisite for the latter. The inner dialogue has four stages or steps: (a) The Christian needs to be unshakeably rooted in Christ. (b) He

8. There are several books and articles by Griffiths. Perhaps his *Christian Ashram, Essays towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, London: 1966 and *Return to the Centre*, London: 1976 are more important here.

9. Besides the article quoted above see also the articles: "The Content of a Christian Hindu Dialogue", *Religion and Society*, 6 (1959), pp. 68-71; "Hindu-Christian Dialogue Postponed", in S. J. Samartha, (ed.), *Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths*, Lucknow: 1972, pp. 22-32.

should so open himself in order that the nonChristian religious experience may begin to happen with himself. "With the living Christ to hold us and a general grasp of the faith, we can, rather like a diver joined to his ship by the air pipe and rope, dive deeply into the non Christian spiritualities..." (c) The Christian already deeply engaged in the Hindu spiritual experience, becomes more deeply aware than ever of the irreducible uniqueness and transcendence of Christ of Christian faith (d) The Hindu and Christian spiritualities are deepened together. Precisely at this point "Christian transcendence must manifest its concrete universality by showing that what it surpasses is not simply left behind, but recapitulated, gathered up, drawn into the orbit of *totus homo totus Deus*."

"When for some time this 'inner conversation' has been happening within the Christian or a group of Christian men then one day a Hindu believer comes. He too has been prepared for this meeting by the Spirit. So the meeting of Hindus and Christians cannot be arranged and 'set up' but must simply happen, be given."

Here begins the external dialogue which has also four steps: (a) The Christian knows that he meets his non-Christian friend in *Christ*. Long before being a non Christian a Hindu is an image of God. Instead of asking 'what should I tell', ask 'what does God tell me through His image in this Hindu friend'. (b) Now it is my turn to speak, to share with my Hindu friend, in word or silence, the results of my previous "internal dialogue", as a Christian with his scriptures and with genuine spiritual experience. (c) At the third stage, like the *Incognito* Christ of the Emmaus Road, the Christian helps the Hindu to see to what his Scriptures point to. (d) Now the true face of the "Unknown Christ" hidden and so often deformed in religions of the world including the Christian religion is revealed. This is the moment of conversion, a work of the Spirit, when the Risen Christ in whom the spiritual world of my Hindu, pre-Christian neighbour, is gathered up, purified and transformed, is seen, known and worshipped.

Swami Abhishiktananda, while describing his experiences in the 'Circle', and his other experiences of dialogue, gives us a number of ideas similar to those of M. Rogers.¹⁰ Recalling

10. Abhishiktananda has written extensively on the topic. Mention may here be made of three books: *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point within the Cave of the Heart*, Bombay: 1969; *Saccidananda, A Christian Approach to Aduaitic Experience*, Delhi: 1974; *The Further Shore*, Delhi: 1975. A report on his life and work may be found in *The Clergy Monthly*, 38 (1974) No. 1.

the meetings of the 'Circle' Abhishiktananda tells us, "Christian reading of the Upanishads in the presence of Christ was.. to rediscover in ourselves the secret place of the Rishi's experience, and then under the inspiration of the Spirit and by an existential process wholly personal to each one, to allow the Christian expression and Trinitarian culmination of this experience to find its full development in us. For the Christian to do this, he has to put temporarily aside, *en epoche*, much of the conceptual expression of the Christian faith. He must first of all listen to the witness of the experience itself. He reads the Upanishads so as to enter as authentically as possible into the experience which moulded the religious soul of India."

Two important conclusions the Swami arrives at are: (1) "...the Lord is already in India.. Our role is to help the holy seed which has been sown by the Spirit in the hearts and traditions of India to germinate ." (2) "...India has received from her Creator a very special gift of interiority, a unique inward orientation of the Spirit."

Abhishiktananda stresses, time and again, the need to receive the message of the Upanishads with the heart of a child free, open and full of trust rather than seizing upon what is lacking from a Christian standpoint. The Christian penetrates the Upanishadic experience, and with its help, he sets free the fullness of the treasures contained in the Christian faith experience. "The mission of the Christian in relation to the Hindu is therefore to transmit to him the fullness of the Spirit given to us in Jesus: to make him realize that there is in man something even more ultimate and profound than the interiority discovered by his sages and mystics, a *guha* more secret than that of the depths of the heart of man - the abyss of the heart of Christ, into which no one can enter save by undergoing a death of the Spirit." To do this the Christian must begin by himself entering this essential interiority. He must himself die to self and know the Paschal night before he can ask his Hindu brother to enter this death through which he will find resurrection and transformation.

In the writing of Rogers and Abhishiktananda we see the dialogue moving from a discussion of doctrines or common problems to genuine personal encounter, the encounter of people of faith. Both believe that the fruit of dialogue is to be left in the hands of God, and the Christian must be willing to wait on the Spirit. The task of the Christian is to enter into dialogue in the freedom of love - love which gives openness. Dialogue must be at the deepest level. It means for the Christian entering into the Hindu's religious experience and sharing with him the death which leads to fulfilment in Christ.

For this both the writers are of the opinion that there is need of 'a putting into brackets' or 'putting temporarily aside, *en epoché*' the Christian conceptual convictions.

The Intellectual-Theological Approach

This type of approach is found among most of the writers who are preoccupied with the task of building up a real Indian Christian theology. It may be compared with the pioneering work of the theologians of the Patristic era; like Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, the Cappadocians, St. Augustine or the Scholastics of the Middle Ages. A few of such Indian theologians are concerned with the sources of non-Christian religions, the *Sruti* and *Smṛiti* literature of Hinduism and assess their value for developing an Indian theology. Others are interested in the great Indian philosophical systems and schools of thought including the Neo-Vedantic and modern Hindu writers and the relative value of these for an Indian interpretation of Christian revelation. Still others consider the various *margas* or certain terms such as *Brahman*, *Īśvara*, *Saccidananda* with the same end in view. Various Christian topics have appeared on the Indian theological scene, e. g., Trinity, God and the world, Christ, the Spirit, Church and sacraments, history and fulfilment.

With regard to Hindu scriptures two aspects attract the attention of theologians: liturgical use of such scriptures and theological implication of 'inspiration.' Besides an objective historical-comparative study of the Old Testament and Hindu scriptures, there is an attempt to interpret the inspiration of the Old Testament in such a way as to apply it at least in a limited way to the Hindu Scriptures. In this they claim to get support from the approaches to the theology of biblical inspiration of such modern theologians as Karl Rahner. They would argue that the concept of biblical inspiration does not cover exactly the same reality or have the same meaning when applied to the New Testament and to the Old Testament. Therefore, the concept, which by experience we know to be analogical, may also be extended, even though differently, to non-Christian scriptures.¹¹ Others would express it in a different way: "The Christian community can speak meaningfully of the inspiration of the scriptures of other religions only in so far as its

11. See Ishanand Vempeny, *Inspiration in the Non-Biblical Scriptures*, Bangalore: 1973 and "An Approach to the Problem of Inspiration in the Non-Biblical Scriptures", in D. S. Amalorpavadass (ed.), *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, Bangalore: 1975, pp. 160-64.

experience of itself is no longer that of a closed group but of a community that is open and moving towards the formation of a new, wider community that would be as wide as God's economy of salvation."¹²

A number of Indian Christian thinkers have taken up a serious philosophical dialogue with Hinduism, though only a few of their writings have appeared in print. A majority of these studies are attempts at an objective and critical evaluation of the Indian classical or modern schools of thought either from the Christian or from the western philosophical standpoint. R. V. de Smet, for example, in his assessment of Sankra says that before his teaching is incorporated into Christian teaching certain fundamental wrong views need to be corrected. J. H. Fiet, in his presentation of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, argues that Saiva Siddhanta's claim to be the 'end of ends' cannot be logically established. Other have given their attention to particular concepts. S. J. Samartha, for instance, has studied the Hindu view of history and comes to the conclusion: "without the doctrine of creation, judgment and grace, without accepting the healing fact and the redemptive activity of God, any view of history will be inadequate to provide men with hope and assurance of fulfilment." The approach of R. Panikkar, J. B. Chethimattam, A. Nambiaparambil, T. M. Manickam and others is more positive.

Considerable attention has been given to modern Hindu writers. Studies on Radhakrishnan by such writers as D. G. Moses, Surjit Singh, S. J. Samartha are worth special mention for the light they shed on Christian attitude to Hinduism. Like Radhakrishnan, Mahatma Gandhi has been studied by a number of Christians. Perhaps the most interesting book from the point of view of this paper is *Mahatma Gandhi and Hindu Christian Dialogue* by Nirmal Minz.¹³ Besides examining the Mahatma's religious views, the author makes a creative contribution to the theology of dialogue in the present Indian context, especially the national, political and social context of India.

S. J. Samartha's latest important book, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, pays special attention to modern Hindu interpreters of Hinduism like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, neo-advaitists like Sri Rama Krishna, Swami Vivekananda,

12. This is the view of those who foster the eschatological fulfilment idea about which a word is said at the end of this article.

13. Bangalore: 1969. See also S. K. George, *Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity*, Ahmedabad: 1960.

Swami Akhilananda, and also Mahatma Gandhi and Radhakrishnan, and develops a few thoughts relevant to an Indian Christology taking into account the context of *advaita* ¹⁴

In my view Raimundo Panikkar is one of the thinkers, who with his deep knowledge of Christian tradition in the West, his fairly good scholarship of Hinduism, and his wide interest in comparative religion has contributed the lion's share in the contemporary effort to build up an Indian interpretation of Christian revelation or a Christian interpretation of Hinduism. Some of the topics he has dealt with are: meaning of religion and its relation to actual religions; the Eucharist in its relation to Hindu sacramental religion; the encounter of Hinduism and Christianity; the nature of faith; Christ and *Īśvara*; Trinity and the three *margas*. Most of his writings are not available in English; but there are quite a number of articles and at least two books in English, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, and *The Trinity and World Religions*.¹⁵

Panikkar has criticized, rather strongly, the spiritual contemplative approach of Swami Abhishiktananda and Murray Rogers for proposing the idea of the 'phenomenological *epoché*' or 'putting into brackets of one's own faith' as a necessary condition for a fruitful 'inter-faith dialogue'. He considers such an *epoché* psychologically impracticable, phenomenologically inappropriate, philosophically defective and theologically weak. However, he does not deny the good intention underlying the approach, the intention to avoid undue dominance by one side, or to enable understanding devoid of bias and prejudices. It is also admitted that there is a positive aspect to the approach which lies in the fact that it provides a distinction between the conceptualized beliefs of a person and the underlying existential faith. Panikkar says: "If the subject-matter of the *epoché* consists of concepts we may form about a particular idea, we should be able to perform and to welcome such an operation." He is as strong as Rogers or Abhishtktananda in advocating the need of an inner or 'intra-religious' dialogue before launching the external or 'inter-religious' dialogue.¹⁶

14. M. M. Thomas in his *Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, Madras: 1970, studies most of these Hindu writers and a few more, but from a different perspective.

15. *The Unknown Christ* ..., London: 1964; *The Trinity* ... Madras: 1970. *Cross Currents*, 29 (1979), No. 2 is a symposium in honour of Panikkar where a select bibliography and three articles in appreciation of Panikkar are published.

16. See his article "The Category of Growth in Comparative Religion, A Critical Self-Examination", *The Harvard Theological Review*, 66 (1973), p. 138.

We have seen earlier that the pioneers of the Ashram movement have a great liking for *Saccidananda*, the Indian expression for Trinity and their special interest is to contemplate the Trinity under the *Saccidananda* form. R. Panikkar studiously avoids this terminology even in his work: *Trinity and World Religions*. He finds his clue in the three traditional types of spirituality or *margas* of Hinduism - *Jnana*, *Karma*, and *Bhakti* - which he builds into a triple *schema*, relating them to the special 'spiritualities' of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This book cannot be considered in isolation, without linking it with *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* in which the author had developed an *Indian Christology of some sort*. *Bhakti marga*, which is the 'spirituality' of the Son, is described by Panikkar as 'personalism'. In the *Unknown Christ...* he calls the Son the Divine Person, the Lord, *Īvara*. In order to demonstrate that the work of the Christian mission is that of unveiling the hidden Christ of Hinduism, Panikkar enters on a new exegesis of a text from Hindu Scriptures: *janmādi asya yatah* (*Brahma sutra* 1, 1, 2) which means roughly 'Brahman is the total ultimate cause of the world'. One of the major problems of Hindu philosophy is the bridging of the gap between *Brahman* and the world. Sankara's later followers were obliged to admit that it is not *Brahman* but *Īvara*, who is the cause of this world, though they maintained that *Īvara*, the personal God, is in fact none other than *Brahman* in his aspect of personal God and Creator. Thus *Īvara* becomes the 'link' between the undifferentiated *Brahman* and the created world including the world of men.

It is precisely here - this is the kernel of Panikkar's book - that we are to find our point of entry. For the unresolved autonomy of the One and the many in Hinduism can be solved if we realise that *Īvara* is no other than Christ, the Logos, the agent of Creation, the mediator between God and man. And so, with a wealth of scholarly detail, he interprets his chosen text to mean: "That from which this world comes forth and to which it returns and by which it is sustained, that 'that' is Christ." When the Hindus think of *Īvara* - true revealer of *Brahman*, personal aspect of *Brahman*, agent of creation, origin of grace, yet at the same time himself fully *Brahman* - then they are in fact, though without realizing it, acknowledging the hidden Christ. And the loving task of the Christian mission is to unveil this Christ.

Panikkar has been criticized for interpreting 'paganism' by means of 'Christian concepts', i. e., for 'misinterpreting' it, instead of 'utilizing' it for Christian apologetics. He is also

criticized for giving a 'Hindu interpretation' for Christ in Christianity. While answering these criticisms he comes out with a clear enunciation of his fundamental position with regard to inter-religious dialogue. 'The difference', he says, "between an exposition of Christian mysteries *utilizing* Indian or other concepts and images, on the one hand, and interpretations of religions of the world by means of Christian concepts on the other, would be important if I were engaged in the defence of a particular doctrine, but for one who sincerely tries to find out and express the truth for one who does not discard as devilish either Hindu or Christian traditions, the difference is not ultimate. Indeed, one who is humbly desirous of making a radical investigation cannot take as his starting point a position which fundamentally and inexorably begs the whole question from the very beginning. I do not think that either Christian or Hindu has to start from a kind of entrenched *a priori* which makes impossible from the outset any meeting and dialogue."

Panikkar considers that neither *utilization* nor *interpretation* is the best category to apply to 'religious encounter' or 'development of religion' but it is the category of growth. "In growth we have continuity as well as novelty, development as well as real assimilation from something which was outside and now becomes incorporated, made one body. In growth risk is involved as well as confidence; it may grow one way or another. In growth there is freedom." Growth also implies transformation and revolution. Growth does not deny a process of death and resurrection. If growth is to be a real growth it implies a positive as well as a negative metabolism, death as well as new life.

The obvious conclusion is: "In the contemporary scene in which everything is under the fire of revision and reform, in which every value is contested and the *metanoia* is almost total, the authentically religious man cannot shut himself up, close his ears and his eyes, and simply gaze towards heaven or brood over the past; he cannot ignore his fellowmen and act as if religion has given him complete assurance that he has no more to learn and nothing to change. He has to throw himself into the sea and begin to walk, even if his feet are faltering and his heart failing. We have no right whatsoever to stifle the growing seed, to choke humble and personal buds, to quench the smoking wick."

'Social' Approach

The fundamental starting point of all development in the theology of inter-faith dialogue in recent years has been the neo-orthodox theological stand that Christian Faith transcends Christianity. It further holds that the Word of God addressed to man in Jesus Christ and the human response of Faith to it at a level of human selfhood can find, at best, only a very inadequate expression in the Christian religions. The idea that the Gospel transcends all cultures and therefore it can judge and transform all cultures and communicate its message through them had been for quite some time recognized by theologians and applied to the relation of cultures. But the implication of the transcendence of the Gospel over all religions, including Christianity, is only beginning to be worked out. It means a revitalization of Christianity in the light of Christ, and the recognition of the possibility of faith in Christ being realized by men of other religions and even of no religion and expressed in their own religious or secular patterns of thought, liturgy and life.

From here thinkers take different directions: (1) those who begin with the common humanity of men; (2) those who start with their common spirituality. The second group takes the inner core of religiosity itself as the most important theme of inter-religious encounter. Most of the contemporary thinkers mentioned in the last two sections belong to this group. However, a few of them are open to the other point of view and for some the two points of view are not mutually exclusive. The first group emphasizes the common concern of men for the genuine humanization of man's life in the modern world and confronts, in the process, the problems of spiritual foundation and self-transcendence. It is the view of this group with which we are here concerned.

The number of writers belonging to this group is steadily increasing. Perhaps the 'Secular Christianity' movement in Europe and America, and the 'Liberation Theology' in South America might have tilted the balance in favour of this group. Confronted as they are with the national, cultural and social context of India, they have leaned more and more to the view that mere cultural-intellectual-spiritual approach to dialogue would not help India. A few of them have criticized the past and present attempts to build up an Indian Christian theology or spirituality. They strongly advocate: "The meaningfulness and adequacy of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ have to be made concrete and proved efficacious in the midst of the present social, economic, political and religious ferment within Asia, particularly in India." "It is only as we share in the

struggles and conflicts and tragedies of our national life and in that context seek to answer what it means to affirm Christ, crucified and risen, as the Lord of all life that we can hope to make the Gospel thrustingly relevant to human need in contemporary India."

The 'social' approach is an attempt to evolve a theology not from a certain predefined set of ecclesiastical principles, but from the very context in which the Church in India is engaged in her task of evangelization. The main emphasis of this evolving theology is on communion and development. The mission of the church in terms of proclamation of the Gospel or planting the Church does not fully correspond to the focal points evident in today's process of evangelization. It cannot do full justice to the present awareness of the Indian Church because its context is: the richness of religious experience, the dynamism of a youthful nation, the bitterness and aspirations of the suffering and struggling millions. Hence the evolving theology is woven around communion and development, focussed on Christ the Life in which all form a community of mutual sharing; Christ the prototype of the New Humanity, the common end of all which is the concretization of communion.

In this evolving theology there is an obvious search for a new style of communitarian experience and its expression. The signs are that this search is bound to gather momentum in course of time. Those signs may be summarised as: the recognition of inter-relatedness of the church with other faith-communities on the basis of Christ's presence in them and the consequent readiness for and the possibility of inter-faith communion and development; witnessing is understood as essentially related to a sharing of Christ-experience and transformation of human life in all its dimensions.

It is perhaps Paul Devanandan who initiated a theological thinking along these lines. M. M. Thomas pushed its scope much wider. Among the Catholic thinkers, R. Panikkar, D. Amalorpavadas and many others, are at least partial (and often indirect) supporters of this view. Even the collective thinking of the Catholic Church in India strongly insists the social engagement—a total and integral development of man and society — as extremely important to fulfil the Church's task in the present situation in the country. However, it is the 'Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society' and its organ *Religion and Society* under the pioneering guidance of its founder Devanandan and his close associate M. M. Thomas that has done yeoman service in promoting this particular

approach to Hindu Christian dialogue. The main features of the theology fostered by the Institute are the following:

- Christ is seen as the centre not merely of the Church but of the world: of all people and movements that strive to better the lot of the poor and oppressed. The purpose of Christ's presence and activity in these movements and in nascent religions is understood to be the realization of the New humanity on earth.

- In such a theology of mission, the function of the Church consists in cooperating with Christ not necessarily with the result of extending the institutional Church. Moreover, the Church is not the only form and expression of the New humanity nor is it the only place where the new humanity is realized.

- The evolving new culture of India and of national reconstruction are seen as the process through which the New humanity is being realized in India. The Gospel message and its values, therefore, should be presented in this context. Through our diakonia we should involve ourselves in the efforts and struggles which lead to a realization of the New humanity. In other words, for the Church to be in India now means to be involved in human development.

- Since a fuller human life here on earth is intimately and essentially related to the New humanity, our diakonia aimed at it is regarded as an essential part of the missionary task of the Church and is not a choice but a 'must'. Her philanthropic services are therefore something that stand on its own feet and not a mere adjunct or instrument, of evangelism witnessing through word or planting the Church.

- Since building the New humanity is not viewed as an exclusive task of the Christians but of all who struggle under the leadership of Christ for a fuller human life, our social uplift programmes and other welfare activities become a field of collaboration with others rather than a means of winning people over to Christianity.

- The understanding of salvation as something social and cosmic affecting human life in its totality shows, first of all a change of stress: a conception of salvation in terms of whole individual aggregates of people instead of individuals. Secondly, the same factors also make for a change of outlook, from concern for individual acts of charity and mercy to organized concerted action for social and economic uplift ¹⁷

17. See Anto Karokaran, *Evangelization and Diakonia*, Bangalore: 1978, p. 134f.

Devanandan was fully convinced that the New Creation and the hope of Glory were not things that had to come or to be realized in a distant future, but they were already realized here and now. This does not mean that the Kingdom of God is already accomplished here on earth; but it does mean that in spite of the fact that all flesh is still corrupted by sin and subject to principalities and powers, the hope of Glory has already broken into our midst and this conviction should prompt the Christian to join forces with those of other faiths in waging war against poverty, disease and oppression of all sorts.

M. M. Thomas' approach to Hindu Christian encounter is very emphatic about the need to take into consideration not only traditional orthodox Hinduism but even more, the Hindu of the Indian Renaissance and relate both to modern secular India. In his book *Salvation and Humanization*, he poses the problem whether, 'heaven-oriented' Christianity, for that matter religion in general, has any relevance to 'world-oriented' modern 'secular' and 'material' society. The problem is studied in the missionary context of today's India in the context of modern Indian Christianity, renascent Hinduism, and Indian secularism. Finally, he asks a very relevant question: *vis-a-vis* Religious India's concern for secular values and Secular India's search for spiritual values, the question is whether the present pattern of the Church in India is adequate to fulfil its task. The author thinks that the present form is inadequate. Thomas pursues the issue and champions it in many of his articles and books, especially in *Christian Response to Asian Revolution*.¹⁸

R. Panikkar does not seem to be directly interested in the question of relation between Hindu-Christian dialogue and social engagement. But here and there, especially in his book, *Worship and Secular Man*, he has briefly expressed his thinking on the point.¹⁹ Under the concept of total redemption Panikkar sees the mission of the Church as "not primarily one which could be identified with one religion alone, but being an instrument of redemption of the whole cosmos, co-operating with the incarnate Son and the Spirit." He believes; "... all human activities that have some redemptive value offer a common ground for co-operation between Christians and non-Christians..."

18. *Salvation and Humanization*, Madras: 1971; *The Christian Response*, London: 1966. A good number of his innumerable works are written from this perspective.

19. London: 1973. See also his article: "Evangelization, Dialogue and Development", in *Documenta Missionalia*, 5 (Rome 1972), pp. 195-218.

So the social engagement is neither a means nor a context for making conversions or extending the institutional Church. It is for Panikkar, a human activity that has redemptive value, to which both Christian and non-Christians are moved by the same Christ

J. B. Chethimattam also expresses similar views in his *Dialogue in Indian Tradition* when he says that the centre of dialogue should shift "from metaphysics and questions of belief to the secular problems that affect human existence itself".²⁰ Amalorpavadass understands the great struggle of the developing nations for progress as part of a world wide upward thrust pursued throughout human history. "If Christ, his Gospel and his Church are to transform the world orientate history and lead them to fulfilment, they have to enter into this process, this alternative, this historic movement." The Church must actively be "present everywhere with her humble *diakonia* in testimony to the Gospel and the Kingdom, in her very concern for the contemporary reality and movement in it."²¹

Conclusion

In the past as well as in the present there have been various trends of Indian theological thinking. Robin Boyd points out that two main 'strands' existing in Christian theology no less than in Hinduism are: the *advaita* strand and the personalistic or theistic strand, with the two strands tending to have mutually 'exclusive' clusters of ideas.²² While the former emphasizes the *Saccidananda* and the transcendent unity of God, the latter stresses the *Bhakti Avatāra* idea, and thinks of God primarily in personalistic terms; while the first tendency gives greater attention to the *Jñāna mārga*, the second gives greater importance to the *Bhakti mārga*. To these two trends is to be added a third which emphasizes the *Karma mārga* expressed in the concern for national reconstruction and social justice and welfare.

The stresses and strains are there; but it would appear that Indian Christian literature today is tending towards a combination of these various strands and Indian theology is leading towards a synthesis. Signs of this synthesis can be seen in the interpretation of *Saccidananda Brahman* as Trinity, leading

20. Bangalore: 1969, p. 94.

21. D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Theology of Development*, Bangalore: 1972, p. 16.

22. Boye, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-53.

to a development of the Logos-*Cit* idea; in the dialectical treatment of the *nirguna-saguna* polarity; and in maintaining the equality of *Brahman* and *Īvara* while at the same time identifying *Īvara* with Christ.

Another concept in Indian Christian thought that seems to be capable of bringing about a synthesis is that of 'fulfilment'. According to Farquhar, Hinduism is only a stage in the evolution of religion towards its fulfilment in Christianity and therefore he is tempted to pass a sweeping judgement on the whole 'system' of the Hindus. Abhishiktananda, on the other hand, carefully examines each detail in order to see how it can be fulfilled in the Christian experience. Our study of Hinduism is to be in the context of its 'eschatological fulfilment in the very heart of the *Pleroma*'. He holds that it is the Christian experience which brings the *advaitin* to its full fruition; since in the designs of God, Hinduism tends of its very nature towards Christianity as its eschatological fulfilment. This is very like the 'prophetic' fulfilment of some earlier thinkers like K. M. Banerjee. Perhaps it is this concept of 'prophetic' fulfilment, or the 'eschatological' fulfilment, which is not something to be merely expected, but progressively realized here and now, that will be able to bring together the various tendencies or strands in Hindu Christian encounter and prepare the ground for a synthesis. The eschatological Christ can be the only link that can bridge the gap and bring about the final communion.

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23. See his work: *The Arian Witness*, Calcutta: 1875. Cf. Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, Madras: 1969, pp. 12-17, 89-103.

STATEMENT OF THE INDIAN THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

at its annual meeting held at
Dharmaram College, Bangalore, July 31 - Aug. 2, 1981 on

“Political Theology in the Indian Context”

The annual meeting of the Indian Theological Association held at Dharmaram College, Bangalore, July 31 - August 2, 1981 reflected in the light of the Gospel on the political reality of India today with its structures of oppression and exploitation and the man-made misery of the masses. Jesus of the Gospel, the way he encountered God, his commitment and style of life, and his efforts for the liberation of the whole man challenged us in our deliberations.

(i) We reflected on the political role exercised by the Church in India in the past and tried to analyse the motives behind such political involvement. In a political situation where communalism is in the foreground, Christians also organized themselves into communities and often degenerated into communal groups. In this respect the safeguards provided by law for the rights of minorities were called upon for the survival and well being of Christian communities. Even while the great majority of Christians suffered and still suffer under the oppressive structures, certain well-off sections in their pre-occupation to defend their own rights have not been adequately sensitive to the needs and rights of the under-privileged and down trodden. Owing to the concern about religious and temporal interests the Church has not wholeheartedly involved itself in the national struggle for liberation. Loaded with a theology and outlook conditioned by the culture and lifestyle of the elite, it did not reflect upon or interpret the actual political realities to the people. The Church was practically ineffective as an instrument of social change in India and even an obstacle, and it has not extended sufficient support to the process of social change initiated by others.

(ii) The political life in India today is marked by the conflicts created by caste, unprincipled party politics, disproportionate influence exerted by money, the domination imposed on people by bureaucracy, manipulation of mass media widespread corruption and the opportunism of individuals and groups. In these we must recognize symptoms of a deeper malaise, namely the denial of the real humanity of man. There has hardly been

any powerful protest raised against these abuses, especially since religious leaders and theologians are not free from the influence of different ideologies and trends.

(iii) Today taking into account the political forces at work we should focus our attention of the human community as a whole and emphasize the real values that sustain it. We affirm that God is to be met not only in the written word of the Bible but also in the people's history and their socio-political struggles. The proclamation of the Gospel that is not addressed to the political reality of the poor and the victims of oppression is not the proclamation of the saving word of God. Hence the Church cannot be indifferent to politics, and if it takes the Gospel seriously in the light of modern exegesis and hermeneutics, it has no other option than to identify itself with the cause of the exploited and the suffering masses of our nation.

(iv) Reflecting on the Gospel in this socio-political context we should endeavour to build up a genuinely human community of persons sensitive to the needs and aspirations of all human beings.

1) First of all the very concepts like church and community taken for granted from the past should be questioned anew to purge them of all triumphalism, authoritarianism, hierarchism and preference for the status quo, and bring out the idea of God's people struggling together for the total liberation of man from all kinds of shackles, economic, social political, cultural and spiritual.

(2) Though in the past Christians have strongly reacted against Marxist ideology and its political and social expressions, they have done very little critical examination of Capitalism, its profit centred ideology and its various ways of world domination, and oppression of the great majority of humanity. We must be aware of the subtle ways in which power is grabbed by vested interests, often under the pretence of the ideals of love, justice and non-violence, and actual structures of violence are created and perpetuated. Church and theology must witness to the Gospel and provide effective norms by which every particular system and movement may be judged.

(3) The way the Church should fight the structures of power is not merely by inserting its own members into positions of power and meeting power with power, but more by taking a creatively critical stand about all ideologies and institutions

and the state itself. Like the prophets of the Old Testament we must make people aware of the structures of oppression and exploitation.

(4) The Church should continue in the Indian context the healing and liberating action of Christ. The Church leaders like the bishops, clergy and laity in public positions should inspire the nation with the dynamism of the Christian vision and speak out on various issues that affect the life of the people. Effective steps should be taken to train leaders who are truly imbued with the basic human and Christian values and rise above particular interests and interest groups. The laity should be enabled to fulfil its appropriate leading role in the different fields of secular life. All should be made aware of their political responsibilities so that they can act according to their own conscience without being dictated to by those in authority.

5) We must unequivocally proclaim that the present worldwide poverty and the everwidening gap between rich poor is a man-made phenomenon and really evil. It calls for repentance and atonement in the spirit of the all-round renewal called for by Vatican II.

6) In this we have to pay special attention to the plight of the millions of the poor in our country whose condition has only been worsening and never improving even after independence. Our concern goes out specially to the Christians who come from the scheduled caste background and suffer doubly the effects of exploitation on account of their faith.

7) The theologian in India has a special task to learn from the findings of the human sciences like sociology and psychology and politics and interpret the political reality in the light of faith pluralistically according to the diversity of our regional and social contexts.

(v) Theology arising as it does from a genuine encounter with God in the actual situation of human suffering must maintain the link with actual experience in the ongoing reflection on the saving presence of God in the world.

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